

## DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS

(Luke 16:1-13)

- Intro: In my study at home I have two filing cabinets.
- In one of those filing cabinets.
    - #There are three drawers full of sermons.
      - \*Sermons I have:
        - +Written.
        - +Preached.
        - =During the last 38 years.
  - I have told my boys.
    - #I hope they will keep those sermons.
      - \*After I'm dead and gone.
    - #Not because those sermons are always:
      - \*Great theology.
      - \*Magnificent examples of the art of preaching.
        - +Although I'd like to think that some of them are.
    - #But because of the stories.
      - \*Those sermons tell:
        - +My stories.
        - +Our family's stories.
        - =Those are worth saving.
    - Before I prepare to preach.
      - #I go through those drawers.
        - \*To find my old sermons.
          - +On the lessons for that week.
      - #Not because I'm lazy.
        - \*I want to find something that I used 10—20—30 years ago.
          - +Recycle it.
      - #But because I like to be challenged.
        - \*I want to find lessons:
          - +I haven't used before.
          - +I haven't used with you before.
          - =So that:
            - I might have something new and different to say.
            - I might have something old to say.
              - #In a new and different way.

We use the Revised Common Lectionary.

- We share basically the same Sunday readings with:
  - #Roman Catholics.
  - #Episcopalians.
  - #Presbyterians.
  - #Methodists.
  - #Other churches.
- There is a three-year cycle to the readings.
  - #Three readings each Sunday.
    - \*If I preached on a different lesson each Sunday.
      - +In theory.
        - =I could go nine years without repeating a text.
        - =In nine years I could cover all of the texts.

That's why I was surprised this week.

- When I went through my old sermons.
  - #I discovered that in:
    - \*Four years of seminary.
    - \*One year of graduate school.
    - \*One year of waiting for a call.
    - \*32 years of ordained ministry.
  - #I have never, ever preached on Luke 16:1-13.
    - \*Nor on Amos 8:4-7.
      - +For that matter.
- I began to wonder why.
  - #Was I always on vacation?
    - \*When these texts came up.
      - +Maybe some of the time.
      - +But every time?
        - =Probably not.
  - #I concluded that in over 30 years of preaching:
    - \*I simply chose not to preach on Luke 16:1-13.
      - +Why?

## I. Luke 16:1-13 Is A Most Difficult Passage.

### A. I Attended The A-OK Synod's Fall Theological Conference This Week.

1. Our presenter was Dr. Ray Pickett.
  - a. Ray served as pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church.
    - For five years.
      - #After his ordination in 1989.
  - b. He has a Ph.D. in New Testament studies.
    - Now teaches at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

2. Our theme for these three days:
    - a. *The Economy of the Kingdom in Luke's Gospel.*
    - b. So we were focusing on Luke.
  3. Dr. Pickett was honest enough to admit.
    - a. Something some of us have discovered:
      - In our own Bible studies.
      - In our Book of Faith ventures.
      - In our 5x5 groups.
    - b. There is not always one, single way to read a text.
      - That is particularly true with the parables of Jesus.
      - That is especially true of this parable in Luke 16: 1-13.
- B. But I Told You That I Like A Challenge.
1. So I did my homework in preparation for this morning.
    - a. One of the sources I often consult.
      - In preparing to preach.
    - b. Listed no less than seven different approaches.
      - To interpreting this text.
    - c. I didn't see the value in rehearsing seven different interpretations.
      - Letting you go:
        - #Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.
      - Doing that for you.
  2. Lutheran Study Bible.
    - a. Has no marginal notes at Luke 16: 1-13.
    - b. Doesn't even attempt to explain what's going on here.
  3. I wondered if even Luke knew:
    - a. Why he included this parable of Jesus.
    - b. Luke seems to have three different punch lines.
      - Children of this age are shrewder than the children of light.
        - #Which isn't exactly what we want to hear.
      - Whoever is faithful in a little, will be faithful in much.
        - #I could say something about that.
      - You cannot serve both God and wealth.
        - #I could definitely say something about that.
  4. But I asked myself:
    - a. Why did I duck this Scripture for more than 30 years?
    - b. Why are Biblical scholars all over the map?
      - With their interpretations of this text.
  5. My conclusion is that this parable is so difficult for us because:
    - a. There are no good guys in the story.
    - b. Everyone is a dirty rotten scoundrel.

## II. With Whom Should We Identify In The Parable?

### A. Rich Man?

1. Most of us don't see ourselves as rich.
  - a. In the eyes of the world.
    - Even the poorest of us is rich.
  - b. But when we compare ourselves with:
    - Bill Gates.
    - Warren Buffett.
    - Other folks on the Fortune 500 list.
      - #We're not even on the radar screen.
2. Rich often got rich at the expense of the poor.
  - a. Amos 8: 4-7.
  - b. Merchants couldn't wait.
    - For:
      - #Holidays to pass.
      - #Sabbath to be over.
    - So they could reopen their shops.
  - c. They engaged in crooked business practices.
    - Shortchanging their customers.
      - #When measuring out their goods.
    - Throwing in dirt from the floor.
    - Inflating their prices.
    - Putting their thumb on the scale.
    - Selling the poor for a pair of sandals.
      - #If the poor needed a payday loan.
        - \*They would put up their sandals as collateral.
      - #If the poor couldn't repay the loan at the end of the month.
        - \*They not only lost their sandals.
        - \*They lost their freedom.
          - +They were sold into slavery until:
            - =Relative.
            - =Friend.
      - Pay off the debt.
        - #With interest.
3. Are things so different today?
  - a. Credit cards often charge exorbitant interest rates.
    - Now our credit card statements tell us:
      - #If we only make the minimum payment.
        - \*How many years it will take for us to pay off our debt.
          - +It can feel like being sold into slavery.

- b. Maybe you've noticed how packages have shrunk.
- Like potato chips.
    - #After I finished graduate school.
      - \*I waited for a year.
        - +For the Holy Spirit to surprise me with a call.
    - #I worked in several temp jobs during that year.
      - \*One job was in a potato chip factory.
        - +My job was to change the boxes.
          - =Potato chips, at that time, came in boxes.
            - Bags in boxes.
        - +I would fill the packaging machine with:
          - =Red Owl boxes.
          - =Piggly Wiggly boxes.
          - =IGA boxes.
          - =North Star boxes.
        - +It was all the same potato chip.
          - =Only the boxes were different.
      - \*Those boxes held 16 oz. of potato chips.
    - #Last time I bought potato chips.
      - \*Bag was only 11 oz.
        - +Third smaller than 33 years ago.
  - Like M&Ms.
    - #Hey, I preach what I know.
    - #You can't buy a 1# bag of M&Ms anymore.
      - \*They're 12.60 oz.
        - +Not:
          - =12.0 oz.
          - =12.5 oz.
        - +But 12.6 oz.
          - =I'm sure a lot of research went into that.
            - How small Mars could make the bag.
              - #Before it started to look too small.
    - Like vitamins.
      - #I take no prescription medication.
        - \*Thank God.
      - #But I take a daily multi-vitamin.
        - \*Last time I bought a big bottle of vitamins.
          - +I unscrewed the cap.
            - =Peeled off the aluminum seal.
          - +Bottle was only half full.
            - =I thought I was being shortchanged.
          - +So I dumped the whole bottle of vitamins on the table.
            - =I counted them out.

\*Do you know what I found?

+They were all there.

=I wasn't cheated.

+But the vitamins could have fit in a bottle half that size.

=They were packaged in such a way.

-It looked like I was getting more.

4. That's the way it was.

a. In the time of Amos.

b. In the time of Jesus.

-So who wants to identify with the rich man?

#Who may have gained his wealth.

\*Through shady business practices.

B. Manager?

1. He had squandered his master's property.

a. Same word is used of the Prodigal Son.

-Took his inheritance.

-Squandered it.

#Luke 15:13.

b. Property was his master's wealth.

2. Did he squander it because:

a. He was incompetent?

b. He was corrupt?

3. When I lived in St. Louis.

a. There was an auto mechanic.

-About a block from my house.

b. It was convenient.

-To take the car to John.

-To walk home.

c. When my son Josh was a baby.

-His mom used my car one day.

#To take Josh to grandma's house to babysit.

\*So she could go to work.

-Another driver turned in front of two lanes of traffic.

#Josh and his mom smacked into her.

\*They were shaken up, but not hurt too badly.

\*My car was totaled.

-Between:

#Insurance money.

#Our savings.

#Loan from my dad.

\*We were able to buy an executive car.

+Some executive at Ford Motor Company had driven it.

+It had about 5,000 miles on it.

- d. After a few months.
- New car developed a banging noise under the hood.
  - I took it to John.
    - #John said:
      - \*"You've got a thrown rod."
      - \*"You're going to need a new engine."
      - \*"It's going to cost:
        - +\$1,300.
        - +\$1,800.
      - =More money than we had.
    - #I said:
      - \*"John, how can an engine need to be replaced?"
      - + "After 6,000-7,000 miles."
    - #He said:
      - \*"I could tear the engine apart to show you."
      - \*"But then it would cost more to fix it than replace it."
    - #I said:
      - \*"That's a lot of money."
      - \*"Let me think about it."
      - +I didn't really think about it.
  - I took it back to Ford.
    - #Ford folks did their diagnostic testing.
    - #They said:
      - \*"There's nothing wrong with that engine."
      - \*"You had some loose torque convertor bolts."
      - +That's what holds the transmission to the engine.
      - \*"We tightened those up."
      - \*"You're good to go."
      - \*"No charge."
  - I began to wonder about John.
    - #Was he crooked?
    - #Was he incompetent?
  - I found a new mechanic.
    - #Every time:
      - \*I drove past John's shop.
      - \*I saw an engine hanging off the back of his tow truck.
    - #I wondered:
      - \*"Does John really know what he's doing?"
      - \*"Is he taking somebody for a ride?"
- e. Eventually I got a different car.
- On a cold winter day my Honda Accord stalled in the street.
    - #I couldn't get it started.
  - I had to get it moved.
    - #Or the city was going to tow it.

-I called my new mechanic.  
 #But his tow truck was tied up.  
 \*He couldn't get to me.

-So in desperation I called John.  
 #John came right away.  
 \*He towed me into his shop.  
 \*I walked home.

#Later John called me and said:  
 \*"I got your car started."  
 \*"I hooked it up to my diagnostic equipment."  
 \*"You're going to need:"  
 + "New carburetor."  
 + "New distributor."  
 + "New coil."  
 \*I said:  
 + "John, I'll be right there."

-When I got to John's shop five minutes later.  
 #I said:  
 \*"Show me what you've got on your diagnostic machine."  
 #John said:  
 \*"I've already disconnected it."  
 #I said:  
 \*"Did you make a printout?"  
 #He said:  
 \*"Machine ran out of paper."  
 #I said:  
 \*"John, I'm going to pay you for the tow."  
 \*"I appreciate your getting me off the street."  
 \*"But I don't trust your diagnostics."  
 \*"I'm going to get a second opinion."  
 + "Before I have any of that work done."

-In the 11 years I owned that car.  
 #I never replaced:  
 \*Carburetor.  
 \*Distributor.  
 \*Coil.

#I never got a second opinion.  
 #I just figured:  
 \*I'd gotten some bad gas.  
 \*I had gas line freeze.

#I got the car warmed up.  
 #I got some fresh gas.  
 \*It never stalled again.

- f. But to this day I wonder about John.
  - Was he crooked?
  - Was he just incompetent?
  - #Or doesn't it matter?
- 4. I wonder about the manager in this parable.
  - a. Did he squander the master's property because:
    - He was corrupt.
    - He was incompetent.
    - #Or doesn't it matter?
  - b. When the master comes.
    - Manager is going to get the Donald Trump treatment.
    - #He's going to get fired.
  - c. Manager panics.
    - “What am I going to do?”
    - “I'm not strong enough to dig.”
    - “I'm ashamed to beg.”
  - d. So what does he do?
    - He calls in his master's debtors.
    - #Not his debtors.
    - #Master's debtors.
    - He starts cutting their bills.
    - #With the end result:
      - \*Master is being cheated.
      - +Out of what is rightfully his.
      - \*So that the manager will have friends.
      - +Who will take him in.
      - =When he gets canned.
  - e. Now the manager is called dishonest.
- 5. Master commends the dishonest manager for being so shrewd.
  - a. That's what makes this parable so difficult.
  - b. That's what doesn't make any sense.
    - If we assume that the master in the parable is God.
    - #Where else in the Scriptures does God say anything like:?
    - \*“Good job.”
    - \*“You made the best out of a bad situation.”
    - +“Even if you had to be crooked in the process.”
    - \*“You will find your eternal home.”
    - #That doesn't sound like God, does it?
    - But I don't see God in the parable.
    - #One of the things that Ray Pickett suggested at our conference.
    - \*Whole first-century economic system of patronage.
      - +Tit for tat.
      - +*Quid pro quo*.
      - +You have to give to get.

- \*Being challenged by:
  - +Jesus.
  - +Luke.
- Could it be that that is what Jesus is saying?
  - #God is not in the parable.
  - #God is not in the system.
  - #You have got to look outside of this to find God?
    - \*Your security.           \*Your salvation.

### III. So Where Do We Look For God?

#### A. I Look To 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

1. Which I have preached on before.
2. Because there I find God our Savior.
  - a. Who would have all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.
  - b. Who would have all to be saved:
    - Those at the top.
      - #In the middle.
      - #At the bottom.
      - \*Masters and managers.
    - Those who are:
      - #Crooked.
      - #Incompetent.
      - #Both.
    - Those who know how to work the system.
      - #Those who don't.
    - Those who are dirty rotten scoundrels.
  - c. Who went to the cross.
    - Not to reduce the debt of our sin.
    - But to pay it in full.
      - #With his life.
      - #With his death.

#### B. I Look To This Altar.

1. In bread and wine.
  - a. Given and shed:
  - b. For all of us dirty rotten scoundrels.
2. Here I see:
  - a. Security.
  - b. Salvation.

Concl: That I can be sure of.  
That I can preach.