

SERMON 17TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY 2016

In Jesus' time as now, accumulating wealth was an aim most people shared and riches can be conspicuously flaunted. Throughout the Gospels Jesus tells us how difficult for our spiritual life wealth can be, especially if we give it a place of great importance in our lives, we can only worship one God. Remember Jesus telling one young man who wanted to join him to give away everything he owned? So in some ways this Gospel reading seems to be asking us to check out where our priorities are, would we be willing to give away everything we owned and rely totally on God to provide for us? Also perhaps it is telling us to be good stewards of what we do have, to behave with integrity and accountability.

But this is a strange parable, with no apparent villain or hero, the owner seems to be another absentee owner, the manager is terrified of poverty if he is sacked. Probably the working people that Jesus was addressing would initially feel sorry for the manager, particularly if the

accusations against him were malicious and many people, even today, don't like absentee landlords.

But then, whether he had been guilty before or not, he turns to swindling his master, apparently to 'buy' friends. So is he acceptable because there is a culture of accepting a little bit of cheating, particularly if the other person, the company or the government is very rich? We only have to look at the news to see that that culture abounds today – at least until you are caught.

Then comes the next anomaly in the story, the manager is not punished when the property owner finds out, he does not need to repent, there is no drama, instead the landlord congratulates the manager for acting sensibly.

How the audience must have puzzled about this strange parable, someone rewarded for doing wrong, where is the moral in that? What do we make of this story, which is not one of Jesus' normal ones about the consequences of doing wrong?

Perhaps it does though. Acting wrongly to save ourselves tells us a lot about where our values lie. Lying, cheating, even if it's only by a little, talks to us about our integrity. Being prepared to ignore wrongdoing, even rewarding it is not the way of a person of honest, moral standards.

We are told to worship one God, the God who gave us life, is he the person who is most important in our lives? Is he the one whom we trust or do we rely on our worldly wealth to get us out of trouble? Could we love God still if we were poor, and would he still love us? How do we use the resources we have been given? Do we always behave with honesty, are all our dealings with people above reproach? Do we cheat the taxman, not report mistakes in our bill?

We have to examine our consciences as one day we will before the Judge who knows all. We can only serve one Lord and Master let us pray that we will only serve God.