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Grace and Holy Trinity Church
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Luke 16:1-13

This gospel is a bear. I've heard so many of my colleagues in ministry this week lament that even the most learned Biblical scholars and trusted commentaries have let them down in writing sermons this week. I was right there with them. On Friday afternoon when I sat down to put the finishing touches on an almost done sermon I instead deleted the whole thing and went home.

I found myself thinking - what am I going to do? It is not my normal thing to not have a word written on Saturday morning when I wake up. But I stared at the blank screen for a while, listening to the washing machine running in my home office, hearing the kids watch tv down stairs. As I asked, "What am I going to do?" I heard an echo from the Gospel. The manager asks upon being

removed from his position, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes."

What I realized in that instant is that the manager is desperate. I have heard this parable called the shrewd, dishonest, and deceitful manager or steward, but the truth is that the man is desperate. When people are desperate they do things that are irrational and that would be considered immoral in normal circumstances. But in desperation we do what we can to survive.

When we are desperate we do not consider the effects of our actions upon others beyond those in our immediate circle, our selves first and then those closest to us our family and friends. In crisis we do not remember the oft quoted but inadequately sourced proverb: one does not inherit from our ancestors but borrow from our children. When we are trying to figure out how to survive, we hold ourselves to a

different standard, like sailors stranded without food or water after a shipwreck who resort to cannibalism Jesus does not judge the manager's behavior as unforgivable.

This is the same bottom line that Jesus has been teaching his disciples since the beginning. There is no one who is unredeemable. There is nothing that anyone can do that cannot be forgiven. There is nothing in our human experience which is irreversible, if we trust in God. Not even the misuse of the resources which we have been given dominion over.

Humanity has been doing our best with what we know and have known at any moment in time. We have used our memory reason and skill to survive through famine and plague, through war and natural disasters, and there have been times when we were more or less successful at using our ingenuity to get through crisis.

But what happens when we neglect to recognize that our ingenuity, skills and talents cannot and will not end a crisis we begin to try to

hustle God. We begin to think that through our own hard work, our own determination, our own skill sets that we will be able to find a way out of suffering, a way to make sure that our own needs are met. The truth is that there is only one way out of suffering, only one way out of sin, only one way into a right relationship with God, that is through confession, reconciliation and grace.

What Jesus is teaching us in today's gospel is the same basic lesson that he has been teaching the disciples all along. God's love is for all people the lost, the sinful, disloyal, the desperate, all of us have a place at the table. All of us can be found in the parables. All of our actions can be redeemed, all of our sins can be forgiven, all of our relationships can be healed.

I know that we can all think of individuals who embody the character in today's gospel—and it is all too human of us to judge those who accumulate power or made lots of money while destroying or causing irreversible damage to people, animals, or the environment. But I find it hard to believe that people who knowingly cause

harm to any part of God's beloved creation will be forgiven in the same way that those who are forgotten, judged and dismissed are. However, this is a parable which addresses in the most obvious way the difficult question of what does God think about are the likes of Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot the dishonest, and seemingly evil people in the world.

It seems all too reasonable to my human mind that people who do evil things would not be forgiven. Which is probably what the disciples thought about all the folks that Jesus taught about in the Lukan parables. Jesus would never forgive those people of those horrible things they did, would he? Yet every time Jesus was confronted with the question of who is in and who is out in his Father's kingdom, Jesus responded with, "Yes, them too" no one is separated from God's love and no one means no one. All of us are redeemable. All of us have the opportunity to change our behaviors, to change our expectations, to change our approach to the world about us.

It is never too late. That is the hope of today's Gospel message. That even if we commit grievous sins, even if we destroy creation, we have the opportunity to become a better steward, to learn better management practices, to avert a future crisis. We do not have to become desperate and narrowly focused on our own needs. We can atone for what we have done and find forgiveness, and change our approach. It is never too late. God's love is infinite and God's forgiveness is equally expansive.

It is hard for us to imagine that the same forgiveness is offered to those who kill and maim and destroy as is offered to those who plant, heal and restore, but it is the nature of this parable to remind us that it is not only the Greta Thunbergs of the world who are given God's grace. It is also the leaders of fracking corporations, owners of multi-million dollar pharmaceutical conglomerates, and robber barons whom God forgives. There are saints and sinners invited to the table equally because saints and sinners are whom God has made the rulers of all creation.

It is completely up to us to determine what kind of steward we will be, if we will function from the perspective of crisis or abundance, if we will be forced to face the consequences of our actions, or if we will leave that to the next manager to clean up. We have that choice. And God has already chosen that we will be forgiven for whatever sins we commit on this earth.

That doesn't mean that we ought to go out and sin with abandon. It isn't a golden ticket or a free pass to treat one another with complete disregard. Rather God hopes that the beloved community to come will be predicted by our behavior in this world, that we will hopefully cultivate more leaders who demonstrate the mentality of love, compassion, and forgiveness, following in the footsteps of Jesus and living the pursuit of justice, freedom and peace than those who think of themselves first and worry about how they will survive if all they have done lead them to a place where they are judged harshly.

Jesus reminds us through this complicated parable that we are all forgiven, and all means

all. Even if we don't particularly care for sharing the kingdom with those who may do some despicable things out of despair, forgiveness is forever and everyone.