

The Cunning Accountant



All of us need money—some of us have more money than others—none of us have as much money as we think we need—but all of us know how to use what we've got, to get what we need.

We work for it, or we save it, or we borrow it, or we spend it—we even lose it. As the song says: “Money makes the world go round,” and as the Scripture says: “the Love of money is the root of all evil” Powerful stuff, this money.

Now a moment ago, we heard a Parable told by Jesus about money—actually about a Dishonest Steward, who was about to be fired. (It is from the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 16, verses 1 -13.) You remember the story:

A Wealthy man had a Steward (or in more up to date language, an Accountant, a Chief Financial Officer) who had been embezzling some of his boss's money, and who was told to surrender the books before he was fired. The accountant did some fast thinking – he had no ambition to become a labourer or a welfare case—so he hatched a plan to create a new job for himself. He summoned his boss's tenant farmers, and radically reduced their monthly rent. It was a clever and ambitious scheme to endear himself to the local community of farmers, knowing that they would now want to hire him as their new accountant. The wealthy boss complimented the accountant even as he fired him—because he had acted smart.

OK, what does that mean to us—surely not that we should all become cunning or scheming accountants. Jesus tells this story because He says that the materialistic people of this world often act smarter than the people of the Kingdom. He is also deriding the Pharisees who were so busy following Rules and making money that they had no time for people in need. Jesus does not commend the actions of the Dishonest Steward, but the smarts that he exhibited.

So why did the wealthy boss compliment that dishonest accountant?

First, the accountant's action made the wealthy boss look GENEROUS. He would be still getting lots of rent from the tenant farmers, but now the farmers felt happier keeping more of their own money, with a chance to improve their farms, and their own lives. The wealthy boss was pleased with the happier state of his tenant farmers.

Second, the accountant had created FRIENDSHIPS where before there had been none. The accountant created a community of support and inserted himself into that community—one that had not existed before. In fact, the accountant had created community by forgiving debts, thereby opening up a better future for everyone. Forgiveness does that—forgiveness builds bridges and opens roads for new and happier

relationships. Forgiveness frees people by linking them together in a lifegiving relationship.

Third, the accountant created a FUTURE in which he will be helped by those whom he had already helped.

OK, that's fine for the Parable, but what is Jesus saying to us today? He certainly is NOT telling us to cheat, or to play fast and loose with the boss's money—but He does have some important things to say to us this morning.

First, we are the accountants of God's creation—everything we have comes originally from God, and eventually goes back to Him. He is the wealthy boss; we are the managers of God's creation—and we make money for our future by sharing parts of that creation with others. The more we share God's creation, the better our future becomes. Just as the accountant shared his boss's wealth with others, so we are called to share what we have been given with others. To share money with others in this world builds a future for us all—to hoard money and refuse to share stifles friendship and our own future. It's a crazy rule but a true one: what we share comes back, what we keep ultimately spoils.

Second, the accountant's action created a community that embraced him—and our actions of sharing can do the same. The more we share, the more we become part of our community. As Christians, when we share our money, our food, our talents through the Church, we are building a better future for others, and ultimately for us too. Those who want to hoard what is theirs will say: "The Church is always asking for money." Those who want to give to others will say: "The Church is always giving away what it has to others." Look for ways to give more, if you are wanting to build peace, happiness, and a future in which all can live. By His death and resurrection, Jesus has created a community of brothers and sisters, a community that we share this morning. It is a community that builds a better future for others, because we are all being saved by His death and resurrection.

Third, note that when the accountant was faced with his ultimate termination, he did not give in, or descend into self-pity, or attempt to defend himself—instead, he envisioned a new and prosperous future by involving others. By forgiving the debts of the past, by caring for the poor, the accountant began to create a new future for himself and for others. That's what forgiving and sharing always do. And when we accept the forgiveness that Jesus gives, we too can begin to experience that freedom in Christ that he shares with us.

For us today, it is time to come to the Altar, the Altar of forgiveness, the Altar of Service, the Altar of Sharing. When we come today, it is as one people, unequally gifted but equally loved by Jesus, who has died and risen for us. We come to Him for forgiveness, and to receive the Blessed Sacrament for our Journey. He welcomes us, forgives us, fills us, and loves us, and then sends us out into His world to welcome others, to share that forgiveness with others, to fill the poor with food, and give loving service to those in need.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen