

September 22, 2019  
Luke 16:1-13

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

You may recall seeing an invitation this past June to attend a viewing of the movie “Emanuel”, a documentary retelling the tragedy at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC just over 4 years ago in which a young white man filled with hatred shot and killed 9 African American parishioners after they had welcomed him into their Bible study. There are many things those of us who went took forth from the movie, which is a poignant story of justice and faith, love and hate, and an examination of the healing power of forgiveness. One thing that forever is etched in my mind is the forgiveness offered by several family members of the deceased just 48 hours after the shooting at the sentencing of the shooter. As they stand before a TV monitor enabling them to view the perpetrator, amid unspeakable grief and suffering, they speak these words among others, “I forgive you.” “Hate won’t win.” “We are a family that love built. We have no room for hate. So, we have to forgive.” I am not sure there was a dry eye in the room. It was their demonstration of faith, the mercy of almighty God, and the healing power of forgiveness and grace which ushered a way for hope and healing across Charleston and the nation. (You can watch this video at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/19/i-forgive-you-relatives-of-charleston-church-victims-address-dylann-roof/>)

Forgiveness is a key component in all the gospels, but it is of the utmost importance in Luke’s Gospel. Recall, only in the gospel of Luke does Jesus utter these words from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34) Theologian Sarah Dylan Breuer puts it like this: “It’s (forgiveness) a moral of great emphasis for Luke: FORGIVE. Forgive it all. Forgive it now. Forgive it for any reason you want, or for no reason at all.”<sup>i</sup>

Forgiveness permeates the parable of the “Shrewd Manager” or “Unrighteous Steward.” That may not be the theme we initially hear and plenty of scholars, pastors, and theologians have written many a word about this parable. Many believe the primary thrust of this parable is that there are times we will be faced with decisions and like the steward we need to act decisively and perhaps even shrewdly. Some choose to simply bypass the parable and concentrate solely on verse 13, “No one can serve two masters.” Some focus on being responsible stewards of the gifts God has given us – primarily financial gifts. It’s not an easy parable and at face value it’s hard to figure out why Jesus tells a story of a wealthy landowner commending a scrupulous, irresponsible manager for mishandling his property and finances so badly he ultimately fires him. And then it gets even better because after the steward has been fired for his mismanagement of the company books, he then acts in desperation to save face with the peasant farmers and settles the owner’s debts at a substantially reduced rate without his approval. Perhaps, what he forgives is an exuberant commission for himself he had previously tacked on and was thus incurred by these debtors; but, perhaps not. We simply don’t know the rest of the story; however, we are privy to the response of the landowner and I suspect most of us are caught off guard by it. He is commended. Really, is that what we just heard? It doesn’t seem to fit in with the kingdom Jesus has come to reveal and proclaim.

Perhaps, to better grasp this response, we must ask ourselves what is it that the steward does? Point blank – he forgives. He cancels the debt of the peasants. His actions may have been selfish. They may have been done without the authority of the master. They may have been foolish, but his action of forgiveness ultimately opens the door to his future, the peasants’ future, and the landowner’s future. To quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “Without forgiveness, there’s no future.” This single act of forgiveness has reconciled a relationship with the landowner and with the peasant farmers. This single act of mercy has lifted a tremendous burden off the back of hard-working peasant farmers. In the eyes of the peasants, this shrewd manager, would have been viewed no longer as the enemy but as an ally. The same goes with the landowner who the peasants would have attributed as the one making

the decision to ease their burden in forgiving a portion of their debt. Just maybe the landowner caught wind of this, that is the praises and adoration of the peasants, and thereby commended his servant.

This parable and most of Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God are complex and at times challenging to understand. However, we can grasp forgiveness. Each of us knows what it's like to make mistakes. Each of us knows what it's like to squander the resources and gifts God so freely has entrusted to us and use them in ways that don't further God's Kingdom. Perhaps, we each come before the cross an unrighteous steward in need of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. And it is in that cross we find it. The unbelievable and at times seemingly reckless forgiveness of God. It's that grace that calls us to respond with grace. Grace begets grace. To quote Breuer one last time, "Extending the kind of grace God shows us in every possible arena – financial and moral – can only put us more deeply in touch with God's grace." Forgiveness and grace usher in a way of hope and healing. May we too, be a family that love built. One that has no room for hate. One that has no option but to forgive! Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2004/09/proper\\_20\\_year\\_.html](http://www.sarahlaughed.net/lectionary/2004/09/proper_20_year_.html)