

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

September 18, 2022



FAITHFUL

doing right when everything seems wrong

by Drew Downs

I am quite indecisive. But not because I don't know what to do. I struggle with having multiple strong feelings, seeing the value in each, and worrying that I will make the "wrong" choice. And yet, I rarely struggle with *knowing* what is *right*. Doing the right thing can lead to wrong consequences.

I know that others aren't so much indecisive as confused, conflicted, or feel obligated to stick with something out of a sense of duty.

Even when they know it's wrong. We often call this the bond of brotherhood or family. That sense of obligation that binds us toward preservation. It convinces us that wrongs are absolved by fellowship's intrinsic rightness.

It is then a profound act full of faith to stand up in that space: of being *right* when wrong feels right to others. Risking family to protect the vulnerable, for instance. Or, perhaps, being generous rather than shrewd.

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Two weeks ago, on a Tuesday Rose had some of the recognizable symptoms. She took a home test which verified that she had enough coronavirus in her system to suggest that she had COVID-19.

She isolated and masked, but I started to show early symptoms that Friday, tested negative on Saturday, then positive on Monday. I am now out of the isolation window and in my masking window this week.

We are both feeling much better and are thankful for the well-wishes and concern. But we both still wear out easily.

What a way to spend the two weeks before Holypalooza!

Nine years ago, 14 months before I arrived, St. Stephen's engaged in a combined ecumenical effort with our neighbors: Central Presbyterian and Centenary United Methodist as an experiment of bold witness to the community through unity and common service.

Had the pandemic not eclipsed our gathering in 2020, this would be the **tenth** Holypalooza. So, like Apple did with the iPhone, I'm declaring this one to be **Holypalooza X**. At St. Stephen's this Sunday at 10:00.

The celebration keeps growing, changing, and becoming part of this neighborhood. I am grateful we can continue to share in it. And happy that, after these past two weeks, I can be a part of it again.

With love,
Drew

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FOR SUNDAY

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 18, 2022

Collect

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

From Luke 16:1-13

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much."

Reflection

It is easy to hear Jesus's words about faithfulness and dishonesty and know intuitively that they are true. Most of us quickly get his meaning.

Many of us, however, struggle to understand what it *actually* means.

Part of that is concrete thinking. We might hear the words too literally. We also might struggle with how the binary works here. If having a little faith means you're very faithful and a little dishonest means you're a lot dishonest, then we might find that we

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don't really know *what* we are. Are we faithful or dishonest? And when the wise among us say: "yes!" then we go even more crazy.

Jesus uses these either/or distinctions in different ways throughout the gospels. Often it is simply as a contrast. Other times, it is about simply *distinction*. Sometimes it is to describe right and wrong.

What we get this week is multiple uses of differentiation in the same teaching. And it can get easy to get lost in it.

In the parable, Jesus offers us a distinction between a rich man and his shrewd manager. Then he offers a distinction between being faithful and dishonest. Lastly, he offers a distinction between serving God and serving wealth.

Each part functions differently. And if we treat them all in the same way, literally, we have a total mess. We don't know which end is up.

But if we recognize what the teachings at the end suggest, we will realize that the distinction *within* the parable is not nearly as important as the distinction of the teachings *to* the parable.

The parable, which seems to validate shrewdness is recast by Jesus in the teachings that follow as being about *serving wealth*. That, at best, the attempt to get out from under the rule of wealth is itself *half* the requirement so that we might serve God.

What is remarkable about Jesus's teaching style is that it is so *unlike* the American educational system, which drives us to see everything as possessing a singular, definitive answer. Which is part of the hubris of Western orthodoxy as well.

The truth in these teachings is complex and challenging, but ultimately, vibrant and intentional. And can offer us *clarity* in spite of that complexity.

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