

Wednesday in Trinity 12 Week, Year C

Luke 16.1-9

Today's reading can (could?) leave us a little confused. Is this parable of Jesus against making money or telling us to use sharp financial practices we could get ourselves out of difficulties? Is the master in the story Jesus or not?

This is how the story works: the master in the story had been acting in an underhanded manner. Jews were forbidden to lend money at interest, but many people got around it. They lent in kind, using oil or wheat as a substitute and then charging 'interest' on those items. So when the steward is reducing the bills, he's probably wiping out the 'interest' his master's been charging. The people in debt are delighted; they only have to pay back the original amount. The master can't come back at his steward; his own shady business practices would be revealed. He can only sit back and admire the steward's clever approach.

The deeper teaching behind the parable is that Jesus is advising his fellow Israelites to use their resources to make friends. The crisis was coming. Rebellion and war weren't far away. God's calling for Israel to be the 'light of the world' was under threat – imminent dismissal was coming. Now was the time to use a bit of cunning, a bit of clever thinking, to help cope with the crisis that was coming. When that crisis came, alternative homes would be needed. Hence the master's commendation of his steward for his approach that threw caution to the winds.

So, the parable is directed very specifically at Jesus' own day. How can it be reused in our day, in our time?

Obviously, it has nothing to do with commending sharp business practices or personal finance. Rather, it advises us to sit light on the extra regulations which we sometimes can impose on one another in the church – regulations that are over and above the gospel itself. Our church continues to go through turbulent times and we're constantly reassessing what matters and what doesn't. It seems like the church is fighting a rear-

guard action in the Western world, yet in the developing world, in the third-world the church is growing with life and vigour and strength. What's left to us? I think the parable encourages us to think unconventionally, to be prepared to make new friends across traditional barriers, to throw caution to the winds and discover again, in the true fellowship of the gospel, a home that will last.