



September 18, 2016 St. Philip's Dunbar Visitation with Baptisms

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' Then the manager said to himself, '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.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

"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. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

This is spider season. As I walk up to my front door I invariably walk through a spider web or brush one aside only to find that the next day the spider has woven an entirely new one in the same place. And so these days I walk carefully, for many places I go a spider has diligently, has shrewdly, spun a web across my path.

Would that the children of God were as tireless and as shrewd as the spider who spins a web and then spins a web again, across the path to catch his food.

This is back-to-school season. Parents who have delayed their purchase of everything their children need for school are scrambling to assemble what they forgot.. And so the merchant, noticing this, shrewdly marks down school supplies and clothes to attract the dollars of parents trying to catch up on things they had forgotten or delayed.

Would that the children of God were as attuned and as shrewd as the merchant who notices an opportunity and takes an action to secure his living.

This is harvest season. Summer berries have given way to fall squash. And farm workers have, of course, taken to the fields to pull those orange and yellow and green beauties from their vines. They have learned to move shrewdly and quickly to harvest what they can in the now briefer daylight hours.

Would that the children of God were more like the farm worker who briskly moves through the field to seize the moment of the harvest.

If these three little pictures and the accompanying wishes that the children of God were more like a spider, more like a merchant, more like a farm worker, confuse you, imagine how Luke's audience felt as it listened to Luke's Jesus tell the story he did in our Gospel for today.

Yes, imagine the shock and confusion Luke's audience must have felt as they listened to Luke's Jesus telling the disciples about the dishonest manager. You know the one I'm talking about, right? The manager who upon hearing that he was going to be fired for squandering his boss's property comes up with a scheme to save his skin.

"I know what I'll do," he thinks to himself, I'll make friends with those who owe my boss money or goods, That way when I lose my job and am out on the street, they will take me in!"

And so he cuts a deal with all those who are indebted to his boss, marking down their debt and in the process making the friends he will need once he has lost his job.

And here, of course, is the shocking part. Jesus then tells his listeners that the boss praises the manager for being shrewd and then comments that "the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their generation than are the children of light." In other words, would that the children of God were as shrewd as the dishonest manager had been in the way he dealt with his situation.

The Biblical word for “shrewd” in this lesson is “*phronimos*,” a word that means operating in a way that plans for the future, looking ahead to what might be needed that’s right in front of us and figuring out a way to make this thing happen. In the case of the dishonest manager, that needed thing, of course is a way to survive in the face of losing his job and his home. Seeing this important need, he urgently and shrewdly puts something together right there on the spot.

And so the shrewd person is the one who acts with both immediacy and purpose—like a spider furiously spinning his web; like a merchant pricing things according to customers he expects and wants to attract; like a farm worker, shaping his actions to maximize his yield in the time he has before him. And, of course, like our desperate manager acting to save his skin in the face of his own dire circumstances.

This emphasis on shrewdness, of course, stands in contrast to a perspective that is all about letting go and letting God figure out the future, a stance some of us adopt from time to time when we are perplexed about what to do next. In this passage, Luke’s Jesus seems to be saying this: I seek followers who, with God’s help, are as willing to use their smarts, their shrewdness, their energy, are as willing to take a risky actions as are the people who scratch around to survive within or serve their own financial welfare—either by honest or dishonest means.

And so, where in your life are you sitting back and simply hoping something good will happen for you, for someone you care about, for something good you would like to see happen in God’s world? Where might you make a difference if you got going, if you brought a little savvy, a little shrewdness to and for that good thing? What would your bringing such savvy and shrewdness ask of you that is new, uncomfortable and risky? What fear would you need to overcome in order to do this?

I know for myself that I the fear I need to overcome is the fear of getting my hands dirty—the fear that to enter the fray of the savvy and the shrewd is somehow to risk being tainted by these very things. And then there’s the fear of trying and failing, or trying and ending up creating a bigger mess in the process.

Despite these worries, it seems that Luke’s Jesus wants more urgent, risky future-looking hands-on activism from us on behalf of the realm of God. Maybe that’s because God is no stranger to getting his hands dirty—God is no stranger to trying and failing or finding herself in a big mess. The incarnation itself, you might say, was and is the shrewdest of God’s many moves, a move made under the conditions of risk: urgent, cunning and brash. Perhaps on account of this, God goes with us, God is beside us when we decide, heaven help us, to do the same, to throw ourselves into the fray with urgency and all the savvy, the shrewdness, the *phronimos* we can muster.

Today we are baptizing two children, Andrew and Alexandra, into Christ’s one holy and apostolic church. As we do this we are both commending them to a life of receptivity and listening and, at times, letting go and letting God. And also the baptism we are baptizing them into is a baptism of action: action that takes into account the real world before them and then with urgency acts.

For “let go and let God” has an important place in our spiritual lives—all of us know this. But what needs to have more of place this morning is the savvy, shrewd and risky actions of a person for whom the realm of God and the dignity of all creation is urgent and pressing. That person could be you. That person IS you.