

Stuff

Luke 16:1-13

September 22, 2013

iPhones, Nikes, hoodies, pickups trucks.

Microwaves, toaster ovens, coffeemakers, bundt pans.

Golf clubs, fishing rods, skateboards, mountain bikes.

CD's, DVD's, DVR's, TV's.

Books, Nooks, watches, swatches. Gas cans, afghans, hammers, Hummers.

Shoes and dresses and shoes and skirts and shoes and jackets and pants and shoes.

Power drills, electric razors, wireless printers, soccer balls, shredders, stereo speakers, filing cabinets, sofa pillows, lawnmowers, leaf blowers, bracelets, anklets, earrings, ringtones, toning machines, machine sheds, shed roofs, roofing tiles, tile floors, floor wax, wax candles, candelabras, brass lamps, lampstands.

Stuff! All kinds of stuff! Stuff in the basement, stuff in car, stuff in the attic, stuff at the office, stuff in the cabinets, stuff in the closets, stuff in the storage unit. How much stuff is too much? How much stuff is enough?

As a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, how do you answer those questions? How much stuff is enough? How much stuff is too much? As a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, how much stuff should you have?

Wait! Don't answer that! Don't answer, because it's the wrong question. The question for you as a follower of Jesus is not "How much stuff should you have?" but "How much stuff has you?"

"No servant can be the slave of two masters." You will hate the one and love the other. You will be loyal to one and ignore the other. You cannot serve both God and ... stuff!

You cannot serve both God and stuff. Clear? Clear! This is not hard to understand. Nobody needs to explain it to you. You know what to do. What is hard to understand is the story that Jesus told his disciples to lead up to this punch line!

Jesus' story is about an overseer, a comptroller, a man hired to manage the affairs and financial dealings of a wealthy property owner. And this man was doing a very bad job! He is called, in various translations, dishonest, crooked, unjust, or just plain rascal. At best, he was squandering his master's money through poor oversight. At worst he was embezzling his master's money for his own benefit. The boss learns of his employee's shenanigans and fires him. He tells him to turn over the books and return all of the assets and clear out.

This rascally manager is most dismayed. He is not going to beg. He would be too ashamed, too proud, for that, too used to his place next to the seat of power and wealth. But he's not ready either to do any kind of manual labor to support himself. "I'm not digging any ditches!" He is basically, besides a rascal, a wimp and a moocher.

And that's what he finally realizes he can do. Before he's done, before he turns in the books, he will use his master's loan accounts to make friends for himself, to put other people in his debt, people who will welcome him and take care of him once he is out of a job.

"What do you owe? One hundred barrels of olive oil? Let's make it fifty!"

"What is the balance on your loan? A thousand bushels of wheat? Let's change it to eight hundred!"

So what do you think of this guy? Jesus said his master praised him, praised him for his shrewdness, and Jesus went on to explain that, of course, the people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light. So, Jesus is telling us, naive people of the light, that we should emulate this rascal? Huh?

I don't think Jesus is telling us to be like him. Jesus never says that. Jesus is telling us to do like him. Whatever his motive, this dishonest manager used the wealth at his disposal -- not his own wealth surely, but the wealth with which he had been entrusted -- he used the wealth at his disposal to help other people, to benefit them, to bless them, specifically those who owed money, specifically those who were poor.

And that's what Jesus wants us to do, to use the wealth with which we have been entrusted -- which is not our own! -- to benefit others, to bring blessing, especially to those who are wanting. Make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth, so that when it gives out -- which it will -- you will be welcomed in the eternal home, welcomed by those who experienced your kindness.

We have been talking, Sunday by Sunday, about the marks, the distinctive attributes, of the followers of Jesus. The first mark of the followers of Jesus is purity of heart, wanting one thing, not wanting many things, but wanting just one thing, directing your whole being toward the pursuit of God.

The second mark of the followers of Jesus is generosity of spirit, opening your heart and your arms wide to all kinds of people, even and especially to those who don't expect to be invited, even and especially to those who don't expect to be loved.

And the third mark of the followers of Jesus is this: followers of Jesus don't have stuff, followers of Jesus use stuff to bring blessing, to provide help, to make friends, for themselves and for God.