Ormond Uniting Church

It's Complicated

Pentecost 15

September 21, 2025

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Chair of Council: Dr Mardie Townsend
Music: Peter Hurley

It's Complicated

Welcome to this time of worship. I hope you find this a special time of prayer, worship and thinking about the Bible passages for today.

We Gather

Call to Worship:

Come, let us worship the God

who puzzles us,

who perplexes us,

but who loves us and leads us towards truth.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God,

we gather to learn from your Word.

Where it puzzles us, be patient with us.
When we are perplexed, enlighten us.
Grant us knowledge and understanding,
and the courage to live by your standards.
Amen.

Hymn: ATEB 206 *As the deer pants for the water*

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession:

Loving God,

We give special thanks
for those who have entrusted us with their true riches:
their friendship and acceptance,
their hopes and worries,

their strengths and weaknesses,
their good and bad days.
May we never abuse their trust
or cheapen all that they hold dear.

Prayer of confession –

Lord, we confess that we would like life to be black and white.
How easy that would be − no difficult decisions!
But there are so many grey areas, and we must live with them.

We confess that we would like your Word to be black and white;
but there are grey areas, things that perplex us.
How we would love to hand all responsibility over to you!

But you make us think for ourselves and challenge us to pray for everyone whether we like them or not.
Be with us, we pray, as we work things out.
Amen.

Hear these Words of Assurance:

God knows our shortcomings and limitations.

Yet, still God offers open arms

and hope for renewal in the world is given.

We are free to live fully,

and for this we say –

Thanks be to God!

LISTENING for GOD'S WORD

1st Readings: Jeremiah 8:18 – 9:1 and 1Timothy 2:1-7

2nd Reading: Luke 16:1-13

Reflection:

Whenever this passage from Luke comes around in the lectionary cycle, I always have to read it several times to see if what I've read, is really what's on the page. I usually keep waiting for the twist or the point where the story gets turned around and the manager gets a lecture about dishonesty – but that doesn't happen! Not only that, but the manager ends up getting praised for being shrewd! – and we're left with this very puzzling parable that seems contrary to what we expect to hear. It's complicated!

Today the characters in this parable are a rich man, his property manager and debtors. The action begins as the property owner confronts his manager, brings charges against him of mismanagement, yet gives him a chance to explain himself - ***before*** he loses his position as manager.

We read that he wonders what he will do now that he has been found out. He can't do physical labour and he's too proud to beg. So he comes up with a plan to ingratiate himself with the debtors by reducing their debts, thereby paving the way for him to still be welcome into their homes – as a good bloke, when this has all blown over.

But then, rather than receiving a lecture on dishonesty or being told off for mismanagement, the manager is congratulated for being shrewd! This is certainly not what we're expecting to hear from the gospel!

'The first thing to get clear about this passage is that it is a **parable** - it is not advice about financial management or how to run a business: Jesus is not telling people to cheat on their bosses.'[1] And so with this in mind it helps to know how parables work.

Another aspect to parables, which might help in understanding them, and that is that they have three parts.

- Firstly, they are in a setting that was very familiar at the time of Jesus and which is either drawn from nature or from human experience – which describes the one we heard today.

[1] N.T. Wright, *Twelve Months of Sundays, p.106*

- Secondly, they state a proverbial truth or truths– and today we hear several at the end of the passage – ‘whoever is faithful in very little, is also faithful in much; no slave can serve two masters; you cannot serve God and wealth.
- And the third aspect is that they are in the form of a story.

However, parables are not just simple stories that Jesus told so that everyone could understand what he said. They are a clever way to draw the listener into the story *through* the familiar setting, and then to get them to work at what it means and how it applies to them. Parables require wrestling with what’s been said, they are meant to surprise, unsettle and challenge – and the one we hear today certainly does that!

Luke understood, as clearly as we do, that the issues of wealth and poverty are complex, that *anxiety* about money can be soul destroying amongst both those who have it, those who don’t and those who have entrusted others to manage their savings for them. When we spend money, we have to the choice whether we control it, or it controls us.

So how does this story work and what relevance does it have for us?

Jews were forbidden to lend money at interest, but many people got round this by lending in kind, with oil and wheat being easy commodities to use for this purpose. It is possible that what the manager deducted from the bill ***was the interest*** that his master had been charging, with a higher rate on oil than on wheat.

So, Jesus’ advice to his followers was instead of hoarding money and land and keeping it to themselves, use these assets to make friends, to ensure their survival so that they would still be around and able to keep alive, and keep spreading, the message that he had brought them of God’s plan of love for the world.

It’s been suggested that the proverbial truths at the end of the parable -

- ‘Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much;
- whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

- No slave can serve two masters;
- You cannot serve God and wealth

were added to this passage later and go to the heart of the reality of this teaching. Perhaps they could also be summarized as saying that the life of a follower of Jesus is one of faithful attention to the frequent and familiar tasks of each day, however small and insignificant they may seem.

One Biblical commentator sums this up beautifully when he wrote 'most of us will not, this week, christen a ship, write a book, end a war, appoint a cabinet, dine with the Prime Minister, convert a nation, or be burned at the stake. More likely the week ahead will present no more than a chance to offer food from the food pantry to someone passing, write a note, visit someone who is unwell, speak kindly to a stranger, tell a child a story or feed the neighbor's cat. BUT 'whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much'.

Amen

WE RESPOND

Hymn: TiS 136 *There's a wideness in God's mercy*

Offering and Dedication:

God of justice and peace,

we acknowledge you as the One we worship

and we offer these gifts

and the service of our lives in thanksgiving for all you give to us.

May they be used to bring your justice and love,

mercy and peace,

to fruition in people's lives.

In Jesus' name and the power of the Holy Spirit we pray.

Amen

Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer:

This past week we marked RUOK day and Dementia Awareness week.
And so we pray today for those who feel they have no voice.
Father
We pray for those with a mental illness – who have days and days when they are not OK. They seek meaning from prescription drugs, alcohol, gambling, illegal drugs – the list goes on. They seek help from overworked and underpaid health professionals. They queue for months to find an answer to and relief from their mental illness.
Father, help us to be compassionate to those with a mental illness. Remind us that its not a matter of those with a mental illness pulling up their socks. Stir us into action to listen to their voices

We pray for the people who are suffering from Dementia – some unable to speak clearly, some unable to follow conversations, some confused by their changing circumstances, some isolated because their friends find it too difficult to engage with them.
Father, help us to see beyond a dementia diagnosis to the real person who is actually still available and waiting to engage if only we'd take the time to listen to them. Stir us into action to listen to their voices.

In this season of creation, we pray for your wonderful blue planet – a planet that is yelling loudly that we need to change our actions, in order that the diversity and wonder of nature is preserved for future generations.
Father, help us to amend our greedy need for the latest piece of stuff. Remind us of the fragility of your precious creation. Stir us into action to listen to the groaning earth and act in its favour.

May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in the world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all and to all of creation.
In Jesus name we pray. Amen

These things we pray in Jesus' name with the prayer Jesus taught us to say -

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours
Now and forever. Amen

WE ARE SENT

HYMN: TiS 687 *God gives us a future*

Word of Mission and Blessing:

Go into the world
enriched by the faithfulness of God,
motivated by the values of Jesus Christ,
and strengthened by the energy of the Holy Spirit - this day and every day.
Amen

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