

9.18.2022 Pentecost 15

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Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

“Be faithful in little and in much”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The Bible points us to a God who uses the little things of life to work great things of grace. Jesus summed this up, saying, “*Whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much.*” Jesus’ words are a reminder that it’s the little things that matter most in our lives.

Faithfulness in little things is a profound truth about human relationships, because faithfulness in little things highlights the larger relationships of family, work, community and church. We honor our larger human relationships by caring for the little things of mercy and compassion, keeping our promises and forgiving others. By caring for the little things, we allow the larger picture of God’s grace, forgiveness and love to flourish.

These are some of the little things Jesus is getting at in the gospel reading for today. The parable of the dishonest manager is a reminder that we are to care for the little things that have been entrusted to us, because through these little things, God works larger miracles of grace, forgiveness and love.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man who had a manager. In Greek, “manager” is “*oikonomon*,” a word rooted in the word *oikos* meaning “house” or “household.” An *oikonomon* was the manager of the *oikos* or house. The job of being a manager involved *oikonomia*, meaning “*economia*” or, “economy.” These little words: manager, house and economy matter if we are to better understand what Jesus is saying in today’s gospel.

The management of a house requires an understanding of the economy of the house, the little details that make up the larger reality of the house. A manager’s job today is very much the same as it was in Jesus’ day. To be a manager is to care for the little details so that the work of the house might flourish.

And so, we arrive at Jesus’ parable: the manager was charged with squandering the little economic details of the house, which placed into jeopardy the larger economy of the house. Exactly what the manager did is never explained, but it was enough to anger the rich man. It is notable that rather than seeking the mercy of the rich man, the manager never said he was sorry or sought the mercy of the rich man; rather, he went behind the rich man’s back directly to his debtors and discounted their bills.

The rich man was so taken aback by the brass and shrewdness of the manager, that he actually commended him, saying the children of this age are more shrewd than the children of light.

Though this parable is deceptively complex, Jesus is asking us something very basic: how do we honor the little things in our lives, and to what end do we use the little opportunities given to us? Like the manager in the parable, do we use the little things entrusted to us only for ourselves or do we use them for God?

In some way, all of us are managers. We juggle the little details of our lives, caring for the relationships of families, homes, workplaces, and of course, church. How we honor and use the little details of our lives says a lot about who we are really seeking to serve. The dishonest manager saw the little details of his master's resources as a way of self-advancement and self-fulfillment rather than sacrificing himself for the advancement his master's house.

We live in a world in which we are constantly told that life is all about me and what I can get out of it. The resources, the little details of my life are supposed to serve me before anyone else. It is a symptom of our radical individualism. Yet, all of us also know examples of people who use the small details of their lives for others and for God's larger plans. In the small economic details of their lives, such people use their resources in the management of God's house. For many of us, offerings of time, talents and financial gifts are the little details we prayerfully offer to God. Indeed, some people may even leave a portion of the little details of their lives to God's house, making a bequest after their death, that becomes a summation of a life lived faithfully toward God.

All of us know the phrase "fiduciary responsibility." To be a fiduciary means to be someone who is faithful over the management of the little details of larger relationships – it could be the relationship of a family, a company, an institution, or a church. The word fiduciary, of course, comes from the word "faithfulness." Though the manager in the parable was supposed to be a fiduciary of the little economic details of the master's house, he was unfaithful to the trust which had been placed in him.

Jesus is asking us if we are faithful managers of the little details of our lives that make up all of the larger relationships we belong to. You see, in Jesus' view, all that we have belongs to the master of the house. Our very lives and their small details are part of the bigger picture of God's kingdom and the economy of God's grace, forgiveness and love. To be a Christian is to be a manager of a holy mystery. Each of our lives is a holy mystery that gains meaning when we faithfully care for the little details which have been entrusted to us. Our lives are nothing but little but holy details given to us by God.

As members of this community called St. Mark's, we are each managers of God's house. We have been entrusted with not only a magnificent structure, we have been entrusted with the management of little holy details of grace in the many relationships and partnerships that God continues to give to us.

It never ceases to amaze me how many little opportunities come our way. We would indeed be squandering them if we did not shrewdly use these opportunities to help grace, forgiveness and love grow in this place.

For example, this coming Saturday, September 24<sup>th</sup> we will open our church for an architectural tour sponsored by the Charlotte Museum of History. It is a little thing, and yet it is a marvelous opportunity to share the larger holy mystery of God in this place with others. In addition, this coming Sunday, September 25<sup>th</sup> is another little opportunity to welcome others into this sacred place for an evening with the Charlotte Brass Ensemble. What I am highlighting is that as managers and stewards of little things, of small opportunities, we are aiming at supporting and furthering the larger mission of God's house. The work of God's house needs people who are faithful managers of the little things of their lives, which are matters of the human heart. Jesus says, "*Whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much.*"

A Christian community is founded upon little things. For example, God uses seeming little things like "words," but very special words that become words of forgiveness. A little thing like "water" becomes the means of grace and forgiveness in Holy Baptism. Little things like "bread and wine" become means of grace in Holy Communion, imparting strength and hope. The little things of God's house lead to God's larger things of grace, compassion, forgiveness, and love.

You are all managers of many little and holy things in your lives. Faithfulness in those little things will make you faithful in much. We are faithful in little things, when we feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger because we have been fed, cared for, and welcomed into Christ's body of grace.

We are to imitate Jesus Christ who used the little details of his life, offering them all for others. Jesus came, not to be served but to give his life for others so that they might live.

Be faithful in little things, they are the means of God's grace. Amen.