

September 22 2013

**Scripture Lessons** ~ Amos 8:4-7, p. 841

*Luke 16: 1-13, page 955*

**Sermon**

*The Jig Is Up!*

I grew up watching on television, the 1930's and the 1940's my mom grew up with of course after she had seen them in the theaters, And even to this day, I probably know the stars of that era a lot more intimately than I know the one of my own era. Along with that I picked up some of those strange expressions, some of the lingo of that day. Especially from those gangsters, and cops and robbers movies that we used to watch. Expressions like "being on the lamb" or "Gem me a mouthpiece" or "Locked up in Stir, or Slammer, or the Big House, or "Cheeze it, it's the cops", or "Beat it kid" or one of my favorites, "the jig is up". I have no clue where that expression came from, but I do know it was always used when you were doing something sneaky, something behind the scenes, or pulling some sort of scam on somebody else. And then when they were finally discovered, they were caught in the act, 'the jig was up'. And they could be in a whole lot of trouble.

Now the same could be said for the steward in Jesus parable, in Luke 16, which is our gospel lesson for today. A steward had care over someone's possessions and affairs and in this case the steward managed the largest state of a very wealthy man. But the Lord of this manner and the owner of this estate had it on good authority we are told, although not by whom, that the steward, his most trusted employee, was in some way mismanaging his affairs. So the jig was up, and he was discovered, and he would have to suffer the consequences. We are never really told what the steward's crimes were, whether he was stealing intestinally from the lord of the manor, or he was a slacker and just was incompetent in what he was doing with the masters property. All we know is that Jesus said was, 'the steward was squandering his master's property'. And the consequences were that he must get the books in order or he will be fired one way or the other in the process. And this sets that shrew steward to thinking, how in the world will he work his way out of this debacle? How he wonders how he will land on his feet at the end of this situation? Now he knows that at his age, options are limited. He is beyond as it says in the scriptures, being a day laborer. And he knows that if his reputation is totally trashed he won't even be able to beg for his daily substance. And so what to do?, and then as you have seen in cartoons, a light bulb appears above his head, an idea that may salvage his reputation, and

save his 'bacon' so to speak in this horrible situation. He will play both sides against the middle, he will hedge his bets. First of all he will get on the side of the master's business associate by collecting some long overdue debt, but by discounting those debts in the process. Something like credit card companies do writing off some of your past debts, or the IRS as part of your past taxes in order to get something out of the situation. So he discounts olive oil from 100 jugs down to 50, and he does the same thing with the man who owes 100 containers of wheat down to 80 and then he goes and shows his work to his master, hoping to get his job back, but at the very least able to come away with some sort of recommendation with the next job he takes down the line. By golly, surprise of all surprises, it works. The master knows the steward is tricky but he gives him credit for at least being smart and the chances are increased to come out of this debacle sort of smelling like a rose in the long run. But what about Jesus?, why does Jesus tell us this story and what does Jesus hope we are going to learn from this story? Well part of his words seem to echo the masters in verse 9 as he compares the master's admiration with the stewards trickiness, but if we read further in verses 10-13 we find that Jesus has a radically different view than what is being discussed here. Jesus is more than willing to acknowledge that if you want to make points in the topsy turvy world we live, trickiness is certainly going to get you there, but he also says in verse 8 that we as his followers, the children of light will not function in this way. For us, the jig is up too. No longer will we blindly follow the ethics of the world around us, which often has no regard for God's love or God's compassion or our neighbors around us. And in the process just pretend we don't know any better, put our heads in the sand and pretend that everything is hunky dory. No the children of light, the followers of Jesus cannot so easily and so hypocritically separate daily life on the one hand and what we hear and do and see in these 4 walls which we gather week after week. Life has to be integrated if we are to live our lives with a sense of integrity and we are called upon as Jesus's friend to practice what we preach in our daily lives as well. And the last thing our relationship with God and our relationship with others, our journey of faith is about is trickiness is shrewdness because you may fool those around you with trickiness, you may be able to trick them into believing that you are a lover of God and your neighbor, but you know what?, the proof is in the pudding.

You know, I don't find it a bit scary just getting a little bit afield of this for a minute, that God and Jesus can see through our masks, can see through our tricks, through our shrewdness as the parable puts it, to see the true person inside of us. In fact I see it as a relief sort of like pouring your heart out to a friend or a spouse or a pastor or a counselor when things are at their worst in

**your life. As Jesus puts it in Luke for today, God knows whether we have been faithful with the life that we have been given. He knows whether we have been faithful with our time and talent, he know whether we have been faithful with our material possessions, our connections and our network even our very bodies themselves. And if we can't even be good stewards of our own lives how in the world can God entrust us with things of God's kingdom. How can God entrust us with kindness and compassion, with mercy, with hope, with justice, with a sense of contentment and most of all God's love which is to be shared with all those around us? Verse 13 puts it in pretty dark terms. We can only hide our true selves, we can only hide our true motivation, we can only hide our true heart for so long before that jig is up. Jesus says we either put our priorities in order where our faith is concerned, or we become slaves to what he calls mammon. Now mammon is a Greek word that means money, but I think the meaning can be expanded to mean this: A profit at all costs world where our compassion for our neighbor and love of God takes second place if it takes any place in our lives at all.**

**Speaking of stewardship which we have been doing for the last few weeks, many times as we speak of it we speak about how we will support our church this coming year in terms of faith, we speak of it as taking a risk on a future of the gifts that God has given to us. Today though I want to take just one more step with that and speak of it in terms of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. And the question is this, do we just pay lip service to the fact that we love God and care about the ministry of the United Church of Christ, or in some sense isn't the jig up at times like this where we have to put our money where our mouth is and all our excuses aside and chose whom in this life we will serve. We are going to be able to tell in the days ahead. We are going to be able to tell if we work together to keep our ministry and this place on track, not only for us, not only for our children but for our children's children as well. Together we say, Amen.**