

**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Sunday closest to September 21**



**Proper 20
Year C
RCL**

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

The Collect

The Collect

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Amos 8:4-7

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, “When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.”
The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Psalm 113

Laudate, pueri

1 Hallelujah!

Give praise, you servants of the LORD; *
praise the Name of the LORD.

2 Let the Name of the LORD be blessed, *
from this time forth for evermore.

3 From the rising of the sun to its going down *
let the Name of the LORD be praised.

4 The LORD is high above all nations, *
and his glory above the heavens.

5 Who is like the LORD our God, who sits enthroned on
high *

but stoops to behold the heavens and the earth?

6 He takes up the weak out of the dust *
and lifts up the poor from the ashes.

7 He sets them with the princes, *
with the princes of his people.

8 He makes the woman of a childless house *
to be a joyful mother of children.

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.”

SERMON

This week, Session's question is, "What makes us unique?" Apart from being a uniquely good looking bunch, I mean. What makes us unique? My vacation-that-wasn't put this question on the day when the Revised Common Lectionary gives us one of the most difficult parables in the Gospels—that of the dishonest steward. The story involves a manager who squanders his master's resources and gets caught. The master fires him, so he goes behind the master's back, reduces debts owed to the master without his knowledge, and thereby buys the friendship of the debtors so he doesn't have to work for a living. From this I'm supposed to find a lesson about what is unique about us? Oy!

What struck me as I wrestled with this is the notion that worldly goods are valueless compared to things of

the spirit, so my mind flew to our worldly resources as an example of at least one way in which we are unique. We sit on some valuable real estate. We have a pavilion and a fire pit. We've got a honking big pipe organ! Then, I stopped thinking like a lawyer, came to my senses and realized something important: the real thing of value we have is a long history in the Bellefonte community.

Pat reminded me of the beginning of this church and how well it was named. She told me of families in Bellefonte that recognized the need for a center to the community, a place where the people of Bellefonte could come together for worship and fellowship. A few families began meeting in the basement of the school. Money was raised and a church was built. That's astonishing! There arose within the community of Bellefonte a conviction that a church be built and it was done! Just

as in the case of Paul's house churches which had no assets and no power, this church raised itself from nothing, a group of believers in a basement, to become the actual center of the community, a position it held for decades. In return, the church, which called itself "Community" brought the story of our faith to life within the larger community. In addition to liturgical worship on Sunday, we put on the Living Nativity. Many people still fondly remember that as a part of their family Christmas traditions. This church used its worldly wealth to touch the community outside its congregation by a singular display dramatizing the birth of Jesus. It's easy to overlook the significance of that outreach, but it is simply not possible to teach the birth of Jesus from a book. Viewing the Living Nativity puts meat on the bone. The story, which too often atrophies into just one of many treasured stories in our minds, be-

comes real, an actual event peopled not with familiar characters from our childhood, but by actual living, breathing people. Seeing Ronnie tending the fire, seeing the star, living your way through the story, moves the story of the coming of the Lord from the dusty King James English of a story to the blood and guts reality in which we live.

We did good. We matched our actions to the times, and brought the message in a way that the world as it was then could hear it. Now, going forward, we are challenged by our past success. Our obligation hasn't changed; the times have, and we are still challenged to do as we have done, utilizing our position in the community to fulfill the will of God. It is our calling, and the call we have received is to be faithful to it. To abandon that call and replace it with comfortable, non-challenging worship in a familiar space, would earn con-

demnation.

“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?”

When we began, the conviction blossomed into the reality of this church because the demographics of Bellefonte included so many highly paid Ashland Oil executives. We are still a wealthy community, but the larger community in which we live has changed radically. The time in which we now live is frightening. The “economy”, by which we mean the measure of those who buy and sell is favorable. The wages of those who labor and toil is not. I saw a political cartoon last week. A politician was bragging about having created 50,000 new jobs. The woman to whom he was speaking replied, “I know. I have three of them and I still can’t

pay the rent.” We see young people who have done what we told them was wise and obtained an education beginning their lives with debt they can never repay. Yes, the interest on that debt inflates the measure of those who buy and sell, but at what cost?

Has Community Presbyterian no longer a word to speak? I do not believe that. Not for a minute. We are not to make friends of “dishonest wealth”, but by means of it. We have a unique position in the community. We arose from it. We spoke to it. Our call is now the same as it was then – to bring the story of the coming of the Lord into our community in ways it can be heard. Our call is not to provide a non-challenging locus to consume neutered religion. We are to speak the Word into the world! We have facilities which sit idle, the pavilion, the field, the sanctuary. We must re-dedicate these assets to awakening the call of God to His people

within the community.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright 2019 J. Stewart Schneider