

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Amos 8: 4-7

Psalm 113: 1-2, 4-6, 7-8

1 Timothy 2: 1-8

Luke 16: 1-13

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I love to read or watch the news, but the older I get, the less patience I have with the experts whose opinions are continually broadcast on every topic under the sun. As soon as I hear the name of the *organization* a particular expert represents, I get bored, because I feel I already know what the person is going to say. An exception is when something unprecedented or utterly surprising happens in the world – whether it's the election of an unexpected candidate as pope, an unanticipated financial crisis, or some political cataclysm.

On these occasions, there comes a moment when the conventional wisdom breaks down. Until then, the experts are assured in their pronouncements and predictions. Their remarks are characterized by a polish that betrays frequent repetition. Then, the seismic shift occurs, and all their confident assertions are undercut and swept away. The pat answers no longer serve. Party lines blur, and consensus disappears. Now things become interesting. The pronouncements of the authorities seem, awkward, qualified and confused. Suddenly it's no longer enough to subscribe to all the fashionable theories. This is the moment when political careers, academic reputations and personal fortunes are made and lost. Before long a new conventional wisdom will assert itself, and everyone will once again know the correct things to say and do. But in the period before this happens, real cleverness, insight and daring come

to the fore....

The race is on to correctly interpret and exploit the new set of circumstances. When is it opportune to withdraw support from the president? At what point is it acceptable to endorse the military option? Who will be the first to recognize that the pound is stabilizing and it's time to attack the peseta? Timing is crucial. By the time the new consensus emerges, the best opportunity to profit from the situation will be past.

Something like this is occurring in microcosm in today's Gospel. The manager in the parable has it all figured out. He has been exploiting his situation, to his personal advantage, for all it is worth. But now the unthinkable has happened. His employer has found him out, and he has been fired. It's a moment of personal crisis. He can no longer carry on as before. The bottom has fallen out of his world. A lesser man would give in to panic or despair. But the manager is resourceful. By writing off some of the debts owed to his master, he finds a way to manipulate his new circumstances in order to secure his future.

If I seem too approving of his machinations, it is, of course, because Jesus adopts the same attitude. He seems to commend the manager's cleverness and initiative. I'd like to suggest one way of interpreting this enigmatic parable.

Jesus was preaching a Gospel that *should have* revolutionized the way his listeners understood the world. He told them that the poor are blessed, and that the rich are in peril. He insisted that those who weep and mourn are fortunate, and instructed his disciples to love and pray for those who persecuted them. He declared that anyone who believed in him would not die, but would live forever. His followers *claimed* to *accept*

all these things as true.

But Jesus was apparently unsatisfied by the extent to which their acceptance of these new truths had changed the way they lived their lives. He had undermined and swept away what they had thought was wisdom, and yet they continued to pursue wealth and power as if nothing had changed.

By means of this parable, Jesus seems to be urging his listeners to show the same resourcefulness and initiative in *their* new circumstances, as the manager in the parable shows in his. He acted decisively at the crucial moment. This was *their* crucial moment. They must seize it! Now was the time to make sure that their ethics, their relationships, their choices reflected the startling truths they had affirmed in Christ. They should work out the implications of their faith and live accordingly.

I've a priest friend who often remarks, "If you don't believe what the Church teaches about Jesus Christ, that's one thing, but to accept that the Gospels are true, and then to go on living as if it didn't matter – what could be more terrible than that?" Rather, let's allow what we know to be true about Jesus to transform our lives, and our world.