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THE NEW SHOFAR

What is the moral? Forgive! Forgive it all! Forgive it now! Forgive it for any reason you want, or for no reason at all! Just do it!

I cannot help but love the cheek of this wicked steward!

I have a terrible tendency to get in behind the bad character in some movies. If he is likeable rogue, then I find myself wishing for his success, even though he might be robbing and causing havoc throughout the film. There is nothing better than a rogue who has character, style and more front than Meyers. The best one of these for me was Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. I felt cheated when they did not escape in the end. They were my heroes! Then along comes today's parable and I cannot help but have the same response to the crook! But Jesus really praising a dishonest manager? Is he offering us this thief, an unjust manager as a role model?

Luke does love a good story about a rich man. But here the focus of the parable is on the manager. There was gossip about this manager. Talk around town revealed this manager was squandering the owner's property, though we are not told what squandering means in this context. Whatever it was it had to do with dishonest dealings. He is, after all, described as being a *dishonest manager*.

The owner clearly has a staffing problem

The owner then summoned the manager challenging over what was going on. It seems that there are three different themes here: **First**, the owner rightly asks the manager if the rumours were true – *What is this that I hear about you?* **Secondly**: The owner wants to go over the books with the manager...*Give me an accounting of your management.* **Thirdly**: The manager is sacked before he can answer the charges. ...*because you can no longer be manager.* At this stage of the parable he is now officially a dishonest man. A crook.

It was a bit like being given two weeks' notice. He still has time in his employment and wants to put it to good use because if he is not working as a steward, he is doomed for he cannot do any kind of manual work. One by one he calls on the people who owe money to the owner and negotiates reduced settlements. The way the story is told, this manager apparently has no authority to do this. The owner did not intend for the manager to take this action. And make no mistake about it; it is stealing from the owner to so reduce the payments to him.

The debtors would be eternally grateful to the manager. And why not! They would have said to him...*we won't forget this kind consideration on your behalf.* If the manager shows up in a few weeks, and asks these debtors for a job, they will have a sense of obligation to him. It was a stroke of genius to ingratiate himself to people who could help him out after his employment with the owner.

The wonder praises his quick wittedness not his dishonesty

After all of this criminal skulduggery, the master responds in an extraordinary manner: *His lord commended the dishonest manager because he had done wisely.*

This is where this story becomes difficult for the modern mind. Why on earth did this owner commend the dishonest manager who had just caused him to lose a great deal of his wealth? And by implication, is Jesus commending this dishonesty as well. Is this dishonest manager our role model as disciples?

What the owner might have been doing is praising the decisive action taken by the steward to protect his future security. When this man discovered that his livelihood was threatened, he proved resourceful and clever. In his determination to provide for himself and his family, he took strong actions in a crisis situation. Other people may have frozen up, but not this man. They might become immobilized and do nothing. This man didn't bury his head or wring his hands. He moves on. Jesus advises that we too should take decisive action, especially about our spiritual lives. We do not have the luxury of dillydallying for the time is short. Putting off our spiritual transformation and shelving the divine call to repent risks placing our eternal welfare in doubt. *Just do it* is what Jesus is saying to his disciples.

When we find ourselves drifting spiritually, we must take decisive action. If we have allowed ourselves to be overcome with anger, disappointment; if we have turned from the faith communities that have nurtured us, this parable invites us to return to the worshipping Body of Christ, to make decisions for Christ.

At the core of this story is also the forgiveness of a debt. The steward forgives. He even forgives things he had no right to forgive! He forgives for all the wrong reasons, for personal gain and to compensate for past misconduct. But that is the decisive action he needed to undertake if he was going to redeem himself.

What then is the moral of this story? It's a moral of great emphasis for Luke – **forgive**. Forgive it all. Forgive it now. Forgive it for any reason you want, or for no reason at all. Just get out there and forgive without waiting for someone else to take that first step. We might have a million and one reasons for not offering forgiveness, for not taking the first step but none of them hold sway in the judgment of God. If Christ can offer forgiveness from the cross – *Father, forgive them...* why would we presume the right to refuse it to others? Why can we not lay our pain and hurt at the foot of the Cross and allow Christ's forgiveness to be our balm.

There is no bad reason for forgiving others. Forgive as God our Heavenly Father continues to forgive. Forget our own noses being out of joint and keep our eyes on what God strives to bring out of our actions for the good of the world. Anything else amounts to sulking, a very human response but one that is caught up in the snares of Satan. He provides us with "really good reasons" for holding back, for looking at this other person/communities as the offenders.; and even if we do forgive, we are not going to forget! I can only pray that the God of Mercy is not going to remember their prayer – *forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of others.* Like the wicked steward, now is the time to act decisively and act as Christ does.

