

Two Masters

22 9 13

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself
and so bring us at last to your heavenly city,
where we shall see you face to face.

Our text today may be found in Luke chapter 16 and verse 13:

'No slave can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and wealth'

Do you like travelling ? Does the prospect of going on a journey excite you, give you something to look forward to ? I was fortunate to teach in a school where the RE department organised some fabulous trips: to India (three times), to China (twice), to Egypt and to Italy – it was truly a privilege to travel to such places.

Life is sometimes seen as a journey. We start off by being born in one place and, as we grow up and age, we are pictured as travelling from one place to another, eventually arriving at the spot where we will die. The spiritual life too can be represented as a journey and I guess the best known example is probably John Bunyan's book, 'Pilgrims Progress'. Christian's ultimate destination is the celestial city, a destination that is echoed in today's collect. So this morning, I want to reflect on the idea of us being on a journey, looking at where we think we

are going and at how we intend to get there. And to do this I want to consider a 'difficult' parable at the start of Luke chapter 16 - 'The Parable of the Unjust Steward'.

To understand this parable, again we need to note the context in which it is told. Jesus concludes this particular lesson with the statement which is our text today:

'No slave can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve God and wealth'

And Jesus embodies the truth of this teaching in the story of the unjust steward. Here, a steward is someone employed to manage a rich man's estate on their behalf but sadly his steward is found to be less than honest. Accordingly, the man is asked to give an account of what he has done to date and clearly he faces the sack. Faced with the prospect of losing his job and with commendable self-knowledge and a degree of sharp practice, the dishonest steward realises he is not fit for manual labour and begging is beneath his dignity so he takes the opportunity to screw his employer for one final time by reducing the debts of those folk who are in his master's debt, reducing what one owes from 100 jugs of olive oil to 50; and that of another from 100 containers of wheat to 80. By so doing, the dishonest steward knows he will earn their gratitude and guarantee their hospitality once he is jobless. And, the real surprise at the end of the parable - the master actually commends his steward's astuteness.

So what has exactly been going on ? Simply both the steward and his employer are well dodgy. The one has fiddled the other while the employer is himself guilty of charging interest on what he has leant. You all know the abuses of Wonga and

the scandal of Pay Day loans with incredibly exorbitant rates of interest. But did you know in the Bible that there was a strict ban on charging interest on loans ? One way round it was to write the interest into the loan itself – i.e. you borrowed 100 measures of wheat but in fact you only received 80 but you were still expected to pay back the larger figure ! So all the dishonest steward was in fact doing was reducing what was owed to what was actually received by the borrower in the first place ! Cute or what ?

So what are we being taught here ? That on the journey of life, the wise use of money is important but that money in general and wealth in particular should not be our goal, our principal aim in life. In a well ordered life, it is the love of God not the love of money that should inform our hearts. Of course, we should not undervalue money – it takes too long and a great deal of effort to earn it – but if wealth is what you make the be-all-and-end-all of your life, then you are apt to get lost on the way and are in real danger of losing your soul.

So how may I best sum up today's teaching ? The dishonest steward is held up as an example to us as Christians – NOT because he is DISHONEST but because he is making money a MEANS TO AN END. If we make money the END IN ITSELF, not the means to an end, then we will end up being very sad indeed. Money is clearly useful but it is not what we should make the principal focus of our lives or the overriding purpose of our being – which should be to love God. Let us, therefore, use what we have to the real benefit of all.

But how exactly you do that is up to and down to you !

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

22nd September, 2013

G: Sermons 28 : Two Masters

