



Luke 16:1-13
September 22, 2019 - CLWR Sunday

Here is a *Canadian Lutheran World Relief* story to start the day: A **We Care Program** coordinator was in Swaziland. “We were at a remote school in a rural area. Children travel long distances, many without shoes. When they received their **Learning and Living Kits**, the smiles on their faces and excitement was like watching family open presents on Christmas morning. Young mothers received **Baby Bundles** to support their young babies, and helping grandmothers, received warm **quilts**. While these might seem like simple items to us, the people are extremely grateful for them. We visited communities trying to support orphans, young mothers, school children, grandparents and those living with physical or mental disabilities. In one community where we distributed **quilts**, the grandparents got out of their chairs and started singing and dancing, all as one. This wasn’t planned. The happiness of receiving these **quilts** brought tears to their eyes, while their singing and dancing brought tears to my own.”

On *CLWR Sunday*, we turn our attention to people barely managing difficult circumstances and we easily think, “Oh, no!” So what does a sneaky manager caught serving himself have to teach us?

The Story

The manager handles the rich man’s business. Bills could be inflated and the manager could hide his own surcharge in order to line his pockets. And if it was carefully done, no one would know.

However, the owner became suspicious. Were there too many parties? Was the manager seen with too many shekels? When whispering about the owner and company began, it would hurt business. It was time to put the problem to rest.

The owner asked for the books and the manager was called in to be dismissed. Although he made money for his boss, the manager would now pay a price for serving himself. When he saw his future crumbling, he “managed” the situation. Contracts with clients were re-written with inflated prices and hidden surcharges dropped. As he made things fair the owner would come out looking good. Strangely enough, the manager left with a good reference. He finally figured out that relationships count more than money in the end.

Everything that we have comes from God one way or another. Jesus advises us to manage our resources to help others rather than make life “all about me.” That gets at the point of the story.

Unexpected inspiration

Who would have thought that a shady character would ever be put forward as an example for our lives?

At first he looked out only for himself, but later turned to others. He realized that he could manage the situation by turning attention from himself to others. This move became a blessing in all directions. The shrewdness that he was serving himself with was channeled toward restoring relationships because they made all the difference. So Jesus says to us, “*make friends for yourselves,*” because one day we too may need help.

Managing Life

The story is like a hidden joke. A selfish squanderer with God-given shrewdness becomes an inspiration. He was wise enough to know that he had to quit taking and start learning to give. He knew his life depended on others. In his crisis he needed to move from:

“*Oh no!*” To “*What can I do?*”

When I was a manager in Corrections I had a challenges dealing with contracts for chaplaincy service. The legal department sternly reminded me of the endless rules: “You can’t do this, you can’t do that!” When I shared the details with my staff they were dismayed and a chorus of “Oh, no!” began to ring out. But one of them who was very shrewd said to me, “Terry, don’t tell us what we can’t do, tell us what we can do.” Everything changed as our creativity caught fire and we looked at things by saying “what can we do.” We could do a lot.

The manager changed his approach by reaching out and giving to others. That is the church at its best because we are rich in gifts and resources. Jesus reminds us that our lives always gravitate toward something — either to a wealth of stuff, or to God who cares for us and invites us to help others. The choice we make shapes us.

Jesus goes to the cross, whispers to us there that we are forgiven and loved without fail. His riches become ours to manage. So whether people are suffering a hurricane, running from war zones, or plagued by famine and epidemic, we move from “*Oh no!*” to “*What can we do?*” That is where *CLWR* helps us do a lot.

Like the manager who lost his job, Jesus shows us that recovery of life is possible. It's like resurrection. We can move forward. With friends and the friendship of God – there is still life to look forward to.

CLWR shows us that we can do so much together. No one need be discarded or ignored. Unbalanced and crooked areas of life can be straightened out as we turn to each other in new ways. Jesus moves among his friends like that. So can we.

This year *CLWR* helped 76 refugee families (221 people) resettle in Canada. One of those family members said, *“I have one word to sum up my experience: BREATHE. I can breathe again. You guys are life savers. It is an overwhelming luxury that there are basics here, like electricity and water. You can't imagine the hardships we have had to bear. Human nature is to adapt, survive and overcome. You have helped us overcome. Thank you so much. Ten thousand thank-you's on behalf of my children.”*

We can do a lot. We have lots to give, lots to share... and a little shrewdness helps.

Amen.