

SERMON KRIJTBURG SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17th 2022
on Luke 16 : 1 – 13 Gregory Brenninkmeijer SJ

My dear friends, once again our church offers us this weekend one of Jesus' famous parables. A story taken from everyday life, but always presented with a bite. A story that in a way shocks us and seems wrong or unjust, not fitting into our well organized and reasonably understandable way of proceeding in our world. Jesus tells us of a man who has obviously been cheating his boss. He is called to give account of his dealings. But then he decides to cheat on his boss some more. And instead of being condemned, his boss praises his maneuvers. He even is held up to us as an example of how to use money, tainted as it is, to make friends.

I think many of us, hearing this parable again, find the behavior of the steward unacceptable or at least fishy. Certainly, we would not find it praise-worthy. But perhaps we forget, that even our well accepted economical order, by which the rich get richer every day and the poor poorer, is at least as unacceptable and often as fishy as the one we condemn. This steward and all of us are part of a corrupt power structure which holds us captive and there is very little we can do about it.

But this scoundrel of a steward finds a way to use the system to make friends. What makes him praiseworthy to his boss? Through his defiant maneuvers, remitting debts for instance, he does something highly beneficial for the debtors using the unjust mammon. He turns the system upside down by making the rich a bit poorer, but the poor a bit richer.

Now my dear people, this of course is a parable of Jesus, not an example for a textbook of economics. And, as I have pointed out many times before, Jesus does not tell parables to teach us economics. What Jesus does in his parables is: Try to tell us, in a rather unexpected way, who God is, his Father, so very different from what people often think about God. The Lord in Jesus' parables, or the landlord or the boss, is nearly always an image of God as Jesus knows Him and wants us to know Him.

It is God who appointed us, you and me, stewards of his property. He hopes that we will look after it well. That we will care for his creation and for all the people He gave us, to see to their wellbeing. All of us have our own responsibility for the women and men we share our time, our world with. Listening to today's gospel should make us reflect: How am I doing in this task? How am I discharging my responsibility for all those the Lord has entrusted into my care? How do I react to people in need, of whatever kind, who cross my path? We probably are not looking forward to the day when our Lord will say to us: "Draw me up an account of your stewardship, because you are not to be my steward any longer."

The steward of our gospel set down to think what he should do. He was well aware of his shortcomings, of the way he had been looking after his own interest rather than after his Lord's. The parable does not specify his crooked ways, but we know ours, and we are probably not much better than he was.

So there he was, thinking what shall I do? I am not strong enough to take a job involving much manual labor. And I would be utterly ashamed if I had to go begging. He was an administrator and he decides to use his skills to make friends for the future. With his talents

and his possibilities he sets out to improve the situation of his fellow men who can hardly survive the problems they are facing, the energy bills that are steadily rising, the household costs that are getting higher and higher. He helps them to lower their debts and by doing that he reduces their worries.

That is what his boss sees and finds praiseworthy. This boss is not a landowner who suddenly praises a scoundrel for cheating on him. No, this boss is God as Jesus proclaims Him, who praises that one of his servants has used his skills, has used the system, has used the mammon, to improve the lot of his neighbors.

And then, suddenly, this parable, as always no longer is a strange story not fit for consumption in our times. No, it is a story that holds up a mirror to every one of us today. What am I doing to improve the plight of my neighbor in need? How do I use my talents and my opportunities to help people I know to cope with their impossibilities. Am I just looking after my own interests, making sure that I don't lose out? Or will the good Lord, overseeing my life, find it praiseworthy, because I have, to the best of my ability, looked after the people who came into my life? That, as we know only too well, is the only criterium we find in the gospel for God's loving praise. Amen