

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 22, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Take a Chance on Me”

Based on Luke 16:1-13

So was the manager a scoundrel or a shrewd operator worth a second chance?

He'd been skimming off the top of his boss' accounts.
He'd been caught.
He'd been fired.
Seems simple enough.
Right is right, and wrong is wrong.
He was a scoundrel, through and through.
End of story. Right?

Well, maybe not so fast. It seems that in ancient Jewish culture, it was against the law to charge interest to a fellow man for a loan, or supplies, or services rendered. So it was quite a common practice, to over-inflate the price of a loan. The result was in fact, a loan with interest, but the 'little bit added' was not technically 'interest', just a 'management fee' if you will. It was a neat and tidy and slightly shady, but not illegal way to skirt around the law.

The one who took the loan knew it.
The manager knew it.
So everyone was good, right?

Well, it still leaves a little bit of a bad taste in my mouth. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, right? But, now the waters get even muddier.

‘NO ONE
CAN SERVE
TWO
MASTERS.’
~LUKE 16:3

Because if this was the accepted practice with loans, when Jesus told His parable, then possibly, the manager was not really skimming off the top of his boss' business deals, but just following through with the accepted practice of the day. When the manager started cutting deals with everyone who had an outstanding loan, he could very well have just been putting back the loans to their original amounts, and writing off the 'management fee.

The boss would have been happy, because his loans would be repaid.

The people carrying the loan would have been happy because

their repayment plan just took a quick turn in the right direction. The manager would have been happy because,

“People will welcome me into their houses.” (v4)

He might have lost his job, but he wouldn't have lost his friends. And they might have a line on a new job in the next town, or offer a hot meal while he figured out what to do next.

The best of a bad situation.
All good, right?

Well, I still have that bad taste in my mouth. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, right?

But now I'm starting to get a little confused about what is right and what is not so right but maybe not wrong. And even more confusing...

- o Who was in the right and who was in the wrong?
- o When is something really wrong, and not just slightly wrong, or just going with the flow?
- o Do any of these mental gymnastics matter to Christ? But just when I think I can hold on to right and wrong, the waters get murkier than

ever. What if the manager, knowing he had done wrong, knowing he had lost his job, knowing that his future days were going to be a bit rough, had a rather terse talk with himself and took responsibility for his actions, as acceptable or unacceptable as they may have been.

On his left was his very wealthy boss, whose livelihood would be impacted little by these few small loans on the books.

On his right were ordinary people, struggling to get through the day and make ends meet.

He looked at himself, and realized, that before he had to return the key to his office door, he had the opportunity to help those ordinary folk, just a little; to ease their financial burden, and take some the weight off their shoulders. And so, he filled out a few forms before Human Resources was informed of his removal from the company, and helped those he could with the resources he had. He couldn't fix it entirely, but he could fix it some.

Does that make him still the scoundrel?
Does that make him shrewd and clever?
Does that make him worth a second chance?

I want to say that the manager was a bad man.

I want to say that right is right and wrong is wrong. And it is.

But I also know that life gets muddy sometimes; we get entangled in promises and obligations and decisions that sometimes lead us into greyer areas of our thinking and of our faith. I'm not suggesting that we in the pews are harboring secrets of criminal code offences in our colourful lives. I'm simply suggesting that often, life is not nearly as neat and tidy as we would like it to be. The world pressures us into thinking that there is something wrong with us or if our life does not appear to be so neat and tidy. But in reality, friends, no one's life is as neat and tidy as they think it is, and as we wish it was.

- o We struggle with our secrets.
- o We push the boundaries a little.
- o We pull back from saying our piece.
- o We act rashly.
- o We do things that seem like a good idea at the time, but maybe not so much after the fact.

So, does that make you and I scoundrels? Bad?
Does that make you and I shrewd operators?
A little harder to answer now, isn't it?

And how do we get ourselves in these messes?
By serving two masters.
"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. (v13)

The waters might be quite muddy and murky.
I may not always make the best choice.
But I do know this.
I'm worth a second chance.
And I know which Master I want to serve.
And as muddy as the waters get, I know He is there waiting to help me on my way.

You're worth a second chance, and a third and more.
Do you know which Master you wish to serve?
Take a chance on Him.