

**Luke 16:1 Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.'**

This is a troublesome parable that most theologians simply don't like. Luke has chosen the hard subject of how we use our skills in serving (to use the parable) "a rich man." Let's start with the assumption this HUGELY rich man is God and the servant is Jesus. That by itself is uncomfortable because the image of the Father who 'loves the only begotten Son' is put at risk. Yet, in service to the "rich man," *so that that "manager" may be welcomed in the homes of others, he gives away the wealth of the rich man*... who by those acts makes the rich man seen as generous and a benefactor. The rich man is served by an outrageous act of generosity. The steward is also welcomed as a reflection of that generosity.

The church is in the business of giving away "the rich man" goods. Most nearly, we participate in the offer of grace and "the means of grace," the abundance of time and talent and treasure, and showing the hope founded in Christ. Our purpose is like that of this manager who in the parable WAS told he can no longer be the manager, but where Luke then writes:

**And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.** Luke 16:8.

Our commendation is in giving away what we have been given.

As my final week before retiring now comes, that has been our mission—that others may know the joy and life given in Christ. The world has enough problems. I often wonder how it clings so completely to the temporary and lifeless choices that each busy day brings. I'm as guilty...no denying that. Yet, when we gather as the body of Christ each Sunday we are offered the presence of the one who IS the author of creation and resurrection. That's far better healing than my blood pressure medications. Will we seek life for the purpose of giving it away to those who are not ready to welcome us?

I was told on my internship in Michigan that I should not get too close to the people who I serve. The reasoning was the need to keep them at 'arms-length' so that one can be dispassionate and impartial in dealing with the variety of human problems. I respect the idea, but it is opposite to the love that is the hallmark of God's reflection shown in Jesus. Quite to the contrary, we must love others so that we may walk more fully with them in marital problems, anxieties, illness, and death...AND in the births, the celebrations, the weddings, the many moments where life is shown more fully. A pastor is called to model love to people who may not love him or her... and even love the difficult tasks that may be to those who cannot accept that offer of love.

My life will be diminished by not being at Faith United on Sunday morning. I will miss you. I will not cease to love you.

*With blessings...Pastor Joe*

**My turn.....**

Our time at Faith United is coming to a close this week. I wanted to take "my moment" to say thank you. You have all been so important to us along our journey here. I remember the first Sunday eight (8) years ago when Joe called me to the front of the church to introduce me. I was so nervous, but I told you that Faith United felt like home. It still does. It will not be without tears as we drive away from here. I have been weepy for some weeks now. I know it is in God's plan that we move away. We don't know where we will land yet, but I trust in

His plan. I know that we will remain active in the greater church and use the talents that He has given us. I also believe that all of you will trust in God's plan for Faith United. Change is hard; as Lutherans, I believe change can be overwhelming. (Just observe the pew we sit in each and every week!) But, with God's guidance, I don't worry about all of you.

When we moved at an earlier time, a dear friend gave me a small plaque that says, "Where God guides, God provides." I truly believe that phrase and keep that plaque where I can see it daily. Change is coming for us, too. We have laughed, cried, grieved, and celebrated with you. I will hold you forever in my heart as we move towards our next adventure. You have each touched us in your own unique way. I want to say a special thank you to Shirley Sweigart for all that she has done behind the scenes to keep Pastor Joe on his busy schedule and for the thousands of details she manages to keep the church office running. Of course, she couldn't do anything about his messy office, but that would have taken a miracle over which she had no control!

During our time here, we celebrated marriages of two (2) of our sons, Andrew and Adam. We gained a step-grandson, Ryan, who is now 11 years old. We will celebrate the birth of another grandchild in April; and our son, Matthew, is working on his doctoral degree in Georgia. We have been so blessed.

One of my favorite Bible verses is Phillipians 4:13 – "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I pray that we will all recognize His plan for us.

*In Christian Love, Paula Veres*