**20250920 Luke 16. 1-18 Unlikely help**

 "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration,” said to be attributed to Thomas Edison. The quote emphasizes that while a creative spark (inspiration) is important, true innovation and success depend overwhelmingly on hard work and dedication (perspiration)

To differing degrees, I think we can all recognise the struggle and hard work necessary to produce results.

So where do you struggle? What has caused you to work hard or think hard?

An old friend who was an RE teacher, she’s also a licensed Reader and she used to teach some of the modules for ERMC, where I did my vicar training and where Matt is doing his reader training, she would say to her students, that many theological texts need two or three goes at reading. If you’ve ever done anything like this or in a different field of study, it’s very true. It is hard! In our Lent group, we read and studied a book by Rowan Williams and this was definitely the case. Each paragraph took at least a couple of goes to understand.

Today’s gospel is a case in point. You will be comforted to know that this portion of Luke has baffled people down the centuries, especially verse 9 where Jesus seems to commend the use of dishonest means to win friends. Commentators agree that this is a difficult passage and have come up with many possible interpretations to ease our confusion. There’s a range of ‘it’s all about forgiveness of debts’ to ‘Jesus understands the complexity of the human nature.’ There is the obvious final saying ‘You cannot serve God and wealth.’ [[1]](#footnote-1) Yet this still leaves the weird dishonesty lingering around.

This parable is curious, a dishonest manager. It seems to commend pragmatism, short-term fixes and frankly, it seems to lack principle and integrity. This does not align with what we understand and believe. [[2]](#footnote-2)

On closer inspection, the parable suggests that a wise person knows they have a deadline.

And just like any essay or project, there is nothing like a deadline to focus the mind.

One of the most impactful moments I experience, is at a burial or an interment of ashes, the words of committal include the words from Psalm 103, ‘For he knows of what we are made; he remembers that we are but dust. Our days are like the grass; we flourish like a flower of the field; when the wind goes over it, it is gone, and its place will know it no more.’ [[3]](#footnote-3)

It reminds me of my own mortality, and not to be frightened but to know that I have life right now and grass of the field I stand on will still be there long after I am gone and under the soil.

There are opportunities in life for making and growing, good seasons when it might be personal growth, family, money, success. Jesus is stressing the wise person understands and lives in a manner, knowing their season of strength in life, is fleeting. And money, easily won, can be easily lost.

I’m not saying all money is easily won, there will have been plenty of perspiration, but we all know of big names, high street stores and businesses for whom they have flourished in the field, the wind has gone over and they are gone.

Likewise, it can be years of perspiration building up a reputation; it can take 5 minutes to lose it.

The parable is directing our thoughts to the reality that sooner or later we will all run out of vitality or even luck. Our prospects can become quite dim and our resources get exhausted.

But the parable counsels that the wise person thinks about their future and develops a plan. And this plan is rooted in being open and receptive to know that help can sometimes come in unlikely places, unlikely people and unlikely ways.

The dishonest manager finds a way, we might not agree with it morally, but he looked beyond his obvious resources to balance his books.

Unlikely people and places. The bible has plenty of examples of people and unlikely places of help and blessing. A good Samaritan on the road to Jericho is an obvious example, the prostitute Rahab in Joshua chapter 2, who hid two spies from the king's soldiers in her house and later helps them to escape in exchange for her and her family's safety. The Magi [[4]](#footnote-4), who, after years of study, take a journey to find this new king, bringing gifts to him, including gold, maybe for this ordinary family, that gold came in very useful. At his death, as written by Mark, it is a centurion who states ‘truly, this man was God’s son’ [[5]](#footnote-5). Again and again, there are people who are not obvious or who are unexpected, strangers, those outside the Jewish and Christian faith who turn out to be angels and agents bearing gifts.

This parable says don’t just sit there passively, waiting for God’s gifts to drop into your lap, though that does happen, you can also do something about it yourself.

Jesus is encouraging us to be proactive. To make friends with the world beyond the borders of our faith and church culture. The world, we believe, is God’s world, he is not confined to our small, created boundaries. God will use that same world to teach us and bless us. God’s love and provision are boundless. And blessing keeps generating and that’s worth more than wealth.

1. The Canterbury’s Preacher’s Companion 2025, Catherine Williams, p.229 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Reflections for Daily Prayer 2019-20, Martyn Percy, p.192 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Psalm 103. 14-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mark 15.39 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)