

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O God, my strength and my creator. Amen.

If you were confused by the gospel message today, rest assured, you are not alone. This is one of the more confusing passages in scripture.

First off, there are a lot of moving parts. You have Jesus telling the parable, which includes the rich man who is the master, the manager, multiple debtors who are the workers, and Jesus' disciples.

But the disciples are referred to with two different names, that being the disciples and also the children of the light... As we heard Jesus say when he shared his frustration about the disciples. Jesus said, "the children of this age are more wise in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." Showing the disciples that there is something they are not understanding...

So, what exactly was Jesus getting at in this strange parable.

Well parables, as I have come to learn, are used to bring about a new understanding and to transform how way we think and act. Because a parable is a story that allows us to experience life differently, connecting ordinary life with the extraordinary ways of God.

And this parable sounds pretty ordinary for us today. As it highlights the corrupt systems in place and how they benefit some and not others...

And also, how our relationships with one another often become messy and broken... Mainly again, because of the systems that are in place.

But, despite the ways of society, systems, and complexity...

Extraordinary grace can break through at any moment and provide in the most unlikely circumstances... the gift of mercy.

Which is what we experienced in this parable. As the rich man provided mercy to his manager.

The rich man commends and compliments the manager, after he went behind his back. The rich man did not get upset or chose to inflict further punishment. Instead, he chose mercy.

Which is quite shocking, because far too often, us humans tend to forget that we too can share mercy with others.

Far too often we become tunnel visioned, worried about all of the things that we need to do.

And in the midst of the chaos, we can all too easily become consumed with what it is we need get done. And in doing so, we stop recognizing the humanity in one another.

Because by going about business as usual, we might actually be trampling on the backs of others... And we might be the ones causing human bonds to break.

After all, the way that we treat others matter.

As most of you may know, I worked in the service industry for many years before going to seminary... And for the most part, it was a wonderful place to work.

However, working in the service industry, also allows you to see and experience firsthand how rude and hurtful people can be...

While at the same time, working in the service industry, also allows you to see and experience how generous, gracious, and merciful people can be.

After all, we are all human. We all make mistakes, and trust me, I make my fair share of them.

And when I make a mistake, or when I mess up, I am always the hardest on myself... And I know a lot of other people are the same way.

So, you have to wonder then, how helpful is it when someone acts harshly toward someone after they made a mistake?

Clearly, they are already feeling crummy, and upset with themselves... So, what they actually might need, is a little mercy.

And God calls us to share mercy. Because God continues to share mercy on us. Even when we continue to have broken relationships with one another.

Which is the other thing about the parable from today. That all of the relationships be it from the manager, the rich man, or the debtors, all of the relationships were messed up in some way, because they were all driven by money and the systems that were in place.

The manager was mismanaging the money to begin with, so the rich man chose to have him fired, and then the manager gave the debtors a break, so that he could have a place to be taken care of when he no longer had a job.

Which is why we get Jesus' famous words at the end of the parable... "You cannot serve God and wealth."

Because the relationships in the parable were all about wealth. Until that is, when the manager decided to give the debtors a break.

Because to serve God, means to serve your neighbors.

Which may look like you taking a breath, praying, and giving someone a break...

Which is not easy to do.

Yet as the parable unveils to us... Jesus provides a different way...

A way where we serve God, through serving our neighbors and their needs.

Because if we want to be in relationship with God, we need to be in relationship with one another.

Which may mean we need to lean into the extraordinary ways of God and provide mercy to others.

And to do that we may need to take a hard look at our own relationships. To see where bonds have been broken.

We may need to allow God to transform our way of thinking.

Because just as the parable from today had a lot of moving parts, our lives also have a lot of moving parts. And it is so easy to become consumed in our own train of thought that we fail to understand what God is telling us.

And discovering that way will probably not be easy.

For that way was not easy for Christ either. As the way of the cross was led by him being broken, bruised, and humiliated by humanity. And yet, even after all of that Jesus calls out to God and says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Now that is mercy embodied in action...

An action that invites us to take the log out of our eye... Because there are going to be times, when we too might not know what we are doing, and in turn, the harm that it is causing. As it is too easy to become complacent about the responsibilities God entrusts to us.

But the good news is...Because of Christ... You are always forgiven... And there is always time to reclaim who God as has called you to be.

For you are always embraced by God who is willing and wanting to show you a different way. A way that is lead with love, grace, and mercy... Amen.