

Does Jesus Want Us To Be Dishonest?

Luke 16:1-12

January 10, 2010

Do you ever question parts of your faith? While listening to a preacher or while reading your bible, do you ever wonder – hmm, I don't know if I understand that, or believe that?

Most of the time those questions, those concerns go unanswered. We either don't want to make the effort to find the answer, or we feel uneasy about asking the question.

Depending on your faith upbringing, you may even feel you are not supposed to ask questions. There are some churches that strongly discourage any form of inquiry. You accept what is taught, no ifs ands or buts!

For the United Methodist Church, we have a tradition of faith exploration. John Wesley, the founder of the denomination taught there should be four (4) influences on our faith. The primary source is scripture. What does the bible have to say?

Besides scripture there is also reason, tradition and experience that plays a role in developing our theology. Each person is encouraged to use those four (4) things and put together a workable faith.

By putting reason into the mix, John Wesley was telling us not to leave our minds at the door.

If faith is going to have an impact, it has to make sense. The only way it will make sense is if we think, ask questions, struggle with what we believe.

It was in that spirit I planned this new sermon series. Following the example of Rev. Adam Hamilton from the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, I am going to spend six weeks answering questions related to our faith or about the bible. Rev. Hamilton titled his series "Questions Thinking People Ask". I am calling my series, "Question of Faith".

In your bulletin you will find an announcement about this series. Maybe you know someone who might be asking these questions. I would

encourage you to tell them about this series and invite them to join you for worship.

Many times Christians are portrayed as mindless folks willing to follow whoever or whatever. Anyone that comes to this series will find out we do ask questions, we do use our minds to make faith decisions.

Recently I asked for your faith questions. I encouraged you to let me know what you were struggling with. We begin this morning with a question I got concerning a particular bible passage.

We heard that story this morning. The person who asked the question was confused about what Jesus was trying to teach. It seems Jesus is affirming the actions that were made by the manager.

Remember, the manager learned he was going to be let go by his boss. In order to find favor with those that owed his boss, he changes the books by greatly reducing the amount owed. Why did he want to find favor? He was going to need a job. "I scratch your back, you scratch mine."

If this shrewd manager is the hero in the story, the question becomes "does Jesus want us to be dishonest?"

I admit this is one of the more difficult stories Jesus tells. As I understand the story, it is the manager's shrewdness and not his dishonesty that is being affirmed. What's the difference?

Being dishonest, fudging the books, cheating people is never encouraged. What the manager did was unethical and unlawful. Jesus calls us to represent him to those around us. We would not be good models of Christ if we went around being dishonest.

But if we are going to advance the Kingdom of God and be relevant to a critical audience, we need to be as shrewd as we can. Did you know the definition of shrewd is astute, discerning, and sharp?

As I said before one perception the public has of a Christian is that of a simpleton who is behind the times. You and I may not like that description, but there are folks who perpetuate that stereotype.

Notice what Jesus said in Verse 8. “The people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light.”

If we can be just as creative, just as resourceful, just as passionate about doing God’s work as we are doing our own, imagine what could happen?

No, Jesus does not want us to be dishonest, but he does want us to be sharp and discerning when it comes to how we plan worship, how we reach out to the community, and how we serve the world.

Bill Hybels is the Senior Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church outside Chicago. It’s one of those mega-churches we read about. His philosophy when recruiting new church staff is to go for the best. He has approached leaders in secular companies and institutions and offered them the opportunity to come aboard the Willow Staff.

He believes the local church is the hope of the world. Nowhere else do you deal with the eternal destination of individual souls. God deserves the best minds in the ministry of the church.

Rev. Hybels admits his offer is often declined. There have been some however, that have said yes. What a difference it has made to his church, and to a greater extent God’s Kingdom, to have these minds focused on sacred work.

I have noticed that the churches that are growing are using people knowledgeable in communication, technology and marketing. Whether they are paid or volunteer, these folks use their expertise to make their church current and relevant.

I guess the question this story raises for us is whether you and I are being shrewd with the gifts God has given us. When I say gifts I mean talents and skills as well as our money.

Notice what was at the end of our reading! Let me read Verses 9-12 again. This clearly has to do with money. The phrase “make friends for yourselves with worldly wealth” seems to imply the idea of buying friends. That is not the intent of Jesus.

We have seen high profile athletes and movie stars surrounded by folks when times were good. It's great when they are on top of the world, but when hardship comes and the money runs out, all those "friends" disappear.

The friends you are to make are actually with the poor. By giving some of your worldly wealth to the poor, you become a friend to them.

Whether you give to the poor or not, it is your choice. We control our money. We spend money on those things that are important to us. I guess another thing Jesus is challenging us to do is examine our expenses. Whether our income is very large, or it is very small, what are we doing with our income?

That clearly is the point when Jesus talks about being able to "care for small matters". If we are shrewd with our finances, we will be able to care for our needs as well as care for others.

Our Scripture Lesson then has a two-pronged challenge. We are encouraged to use our minds and energy when doing Christ's work on earth. Are we giving our best to the church?

We are also challenged to examine our spending habits. Credit cards now separate the charges you make by category; gas, groceries, services etc. If you had an accounting of everything you spent money on in 2009, by category, would you want Jesus to see it?

Does Jesus want us to be dishonest? No!

Does Jesus want us to be great managers of our time, talents and resources?
Yes!