

08.17.22 – A Weekly Word for Covenant Church

Title: “Seeing the Parable of the Shrewd Manager Through Different Eyes”

Scripture Reading: [Luke 16:1-8](#)

Reflection: Rev. Amy Schenkel

Pastor Doug noted in Sunday’s sermon that, unlike Luke’s previous parable of the Prodigal Son, the parable in Luke 16:1-8 hasn’t been the subject of many paintings. I think that is unfortunate because visual depictions help us understand how people in many different cultures and contexts understand the gospel. So, I set out on a Google search to see what I could find.

True to Doug’s word, there were only two significant paintings I could find, both by Marinus van Reymerswaele, a Dutch Renaissance painter who lived from 1490-1596 in the Netherlands. His paintings provide us with an opportunity to practice a little “[Visio Divina](#)” about a story we might not often consider. Literally, *Divine Seeing*, this practice encourages us to prayerfully experience God and what God has to say to us through visual art.

Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see you in new ways, open my ears to hear your message to me today, and open my heart to receive your truths. Amen.

As you look at this painting, notice where your eye is drawn. Settle on this section of the painting and breathe deeply.



Parable of the Shrewd Manager - Public domain

Slowly allow your eyes to travel around the painting. What emotions are stirred up in you? What do you feel drawn to? What might it be like if you were in this scene?

Finally, what prayer is taking shape in you? Take time to pray.

In my own Visio Divina prayer time, I reflected on how it would feel to be the manager, caught in sin, by someone I value in my life. If I had worked hard to earn their trust, and now they lost trust in me, I would feel so ashamed. I would wonder how I could ever repair that relationship and my reputation. That gave me a new appreciation for how the manager might be approaching the debtors, with a newfound sense of what is right.

Now that you've prayerfully explored these visual depictions of the parable on your own (you did do it, right?), a little context about the history of these paintings will help us understand the parable from another perspective. Marinus' paintings were often satirical in nature, focused on extreme greed for material gain. Many of his paintings were about tax collectors, money changers, and lawyers.

In Marinus' day, the financial world was rapidly changing, bringing new opportunities and unpredictable risks. Those in positions of power in financial institutions could easily abuse that power, and many did, making it hard for people to repay their loans. In the painting, we see signs of opulent wealth in the clothing and jewelry of the rich man and his manager. They have long, thin, curved fingers, which depicted greed in 16th-century paintings. I think Marinus may be saying something about economic justice and how hard it is for people in positions of economic power to let go of their greed and embrace generosity instead.

One commentator on this gospel passage wrote, "God turns the idea of squandering on its head. To God, land, resources, and money are squandered when they are hoarded. Holding onto what you own, collecting full value at any cost... now that is wastefulness to God. The master doesn't fire the manager for not producing enough, but for holding on too tight. How opposite of the way we think." Marinus' satire paints the idea that we can be both greedy and generous at the same time. Instead, God calls us to be generous all of the time, just as God is graciously generous with us.

Prayer:

Lord, in your mercy, plant in us the desire to be generous, to hold our things loosely, to set aside our greed and to offer grace in abundance. Teach us more about your generosity and your grace, so that we may be more and more like you. Amen.

Action Item for the Day/Week:

Practice Visio Divina with Marinus van Reymerswaele's Parable of the Shrewd Manager painting a few more times this week.

Songs for today:

[Grace Greater Than Our Sin](#)