Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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"A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property" (Luke 16:1).

Phil 3:17—4:1; *Luke 16:1-8*

One key to understanding Jesus' parables is to ask whom the parable is addressed to and why. For example, Luke's three parables of mercy in Chapter 15 were addressed to the scribes and Pharisees because they were complaining that Jesus ate with sinners.

Today's gospel is addressed to Jesus' disciples, and a likely reason for the parable is that they were reporting to him that his critics were saying that he was too lenient in describing God's mercy. If God forgives so easily, won't sinners take advantage of divine mercy and, more pointedly, what will become of religion and all those who see to it that others keep the rules?

The parable is remarkable in that it seems clear that Jesus himself is like the steward who is squandering his master's property. If God is the rich man, Jesus is telling his debtors to settle quickly on generous terms and to walk away debt-free. Behavior that would seem disgraceful is then said to be praised by the master. Wasn't Jesus in fact "giving away the store," to the indignation of all those who saw his message about God's mercy as a grand giveaway that undermined religion and devalued what they had "earned" by keeping the rules?

A religion of rules for rewards will never grasp the deeper meaning of a God who holds open the door of mercy to anyone who tries to love others, even imperfectly, and for whom religion is a relationship that moves us to be loving and merciful with everyone.

There is much to ponder in today's parable. But can we, just for today, put away our account books, suspend our judgment of others and simply try to give ourselves away? If we can, we will glimpse the merciful God Jesus preached and begin to grasp why the gospel is a scandal to the wisdom of this world.