

Luke 16:1-13 *"It's All in the Ears!"*

September 20, 2022

It's all in the ears, gossip, rumor, sound bytes and truth. This portion of the Luke Gospel is probably among the most difficult for future hearers to understand because it is clearly the tone of voice that might help us understand this rather complex and condensed passage. It also might help us if we lived in the century and in the culture in which the trickster was a hero. The passage is complex because it covers a variety of elements, a rich man, steward and some reporters. A steward with his boss' debtors. The owner's response to the steward, and a saying about stewardship and its rewards and a saying about loyalty to masters. The density of the passage has to do with all the layers of meanings contained. We have lost a lot by not being there both in time and understanding and in the culture.

I feel that this entire passage of Luke would make a lot more reasonable sense to us if we had been there. But I want to take a portion of that and bring it to our attention in a way that might be very, very useful to us in our lives today. The bulk of this first passage, the first eight verses, is built around the report to the rich man, the owner. I am inviting you today to consider for a moment the powerfully effect of the report that was brought to the rich man. Several months ago, it was reported in Congress that Bob Hope had died, a matter of misinformation carried as truth. Fortunately, that error was readily researched and the truth reported. But most of what happens in our talks with others at school, at work, at parties and at church has not to do with the celebrity's death, but with the lives of the people around us. Those who shape the context and the content of our very own lives. It is with them that it is in the ears. Gossip which breaks down confidences or makes

public a private or personal event, often distorting it beyond its meanings. Rumor mongering, which distorts the truth, changing it beyond recognition. These are two of the most destructive aspects of our life as a people of God, as a community, a nation.. They are most vicious because they are very like the two-edge sword that we hear about and we like to think of that two-edge sword as the sword of truth, the word of God that comes from the mouth of Jesus, the Christ of God. This is a different sword. In its forward movement, away from us, it distorts and taints the person who is the object of the talk. In its backward movement it distorts and taints and defiles the one who brings the message, the gossip, the rumors.

The gossip and rumor are full citizens of our communities, along with some bytes masking as information and communication. I have heard them referred to as factors almost as they were independent entities and perhaps, they are.

What if the report on the steward is not true. What if he were not dishonest. Very often it is our task today to discern the truth of God in a world full of distractions and distortions. Jesus, prophetic teacher, challenges institutional leadership of this day. Challenges the people to be stewards in God's household, to be good stewards, not necessarily to be the conniving stewards of the old age.

In children of the light being good stewards of truth and not having those charges brought against us. Challenging those who are in positions of leadership, to make ways to manage distortions for if we do not, we pollute our own houses. Many of us, personally, when confronted with rumors, gossip, distortions that we know are not true, are very likely to say, well it's not about me. I've not been hurt. I didn't say it. I don't need to do anything.

The question is, is it right? Does it fit with God's desire for all persons to be able to live in truth, to do justice and thereby live in peace? We live in a world in which it is increasingly important for all of us to participate in whatever way we can, whenever we can, in discerning and discovering the truth, in stopping the distortions. Not only not participating in the rumors but being willing and able to say, I cannot, I will not participate in this.

So frequently in meetings when people are moved by fear, when they are disturbed by the information or the pieces of information that they are given, when they seem to be impatient to get to the end of it without hearing the whole story. I have seen so many times the one voice speak up to say, I do not agree with what we are saying now. I do not think that we are ready to act. I am not sure we have all the information. I am sure that *I* don't have it.

This challenge to deal directly with gossip, this challenge to deal directly with rumor mongers is a challenge to deal directly with the fear that underlies all of it. And so in our lesson today, we hear the potential, we hear the possibility, we hear the availability of truth for us, reminding us who we worship, God, not how we respond to it in honesty and with choice.

The good news for us today is that in all things, no matter how full of the gossip, or the rumor, or the inadequate sound bytes, or what passes for information, what might be true information, but is not communication. We can choose to seek the truth, to proclaim it boldly. We do not have to pass on the rumor. We do not have to share the gossip. We can often stop it in its deadly tracks by simply saying, "I will not participate in it. Do not tell me that again."

We can respond to the need for leaders with wisdom and integrity in our communities by offering to serve in whatever capacity we are able. We are not called to be the greatest among the greatest, but each of us is called to be and to live as close to the truth which is Jesus Christ our Lord as possible.

Our personal motivation and prayers are made effectual by God's grace and our actions and intentions continue to have an effect in the world. There is hope.

There is God. God is love.

There is grace.

There is truth.

Even more than that, there is love and in that love, all lies, all distortions, all fear . . . die.

Amen.