

Biblical Background

LUKE 16:19-31

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: The setting of the parable suggests a village. Typically everyone in the village would be related to one another by blood, birth, or marriage, and this means that everyone in the village would know about everyone else in the village. The owner of the most land in the local area would be perceived to be a man of significance and importance. One who's personal honor ranking among village folk would be high ranking.

TERMS: Steward This is an employee of the land owner who was tasked to be the agent of the land owner and the person to whom you come to make contracts in exchange for the use of the land. Tenants on the land would trust that the manager has the speaks for the owner.

Master The wealthiest man in the village who owns the most property and "rents" it out to tenants. Renters work the land in exchange for a fixed amount of return for the master. He would be a man of honor among those who work for him.

Master's Debtors These folks would be clients of the master who pay him in the form of what they produced on the land they are renting. The amounts would be negotiated with the master's manager who acts as the Person of the Master among those who work the land.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS: A parable has to have a shock built into the story to grab the attention of the listening audience. In this parable, the shock is a bit difficult to discover because of the genius in the teaching of Jesus. The shock is hidden in what does "not" happen and what is "not" said. In this parable the steward who has been called to give an account of his financial misdeeds, does not find himself in prison or otherwise detained. He is free to move about in the village and devises a clever way to take care of himself when he is cut off and officially out of a job. The steward discovers that the master is a man prone to displays of mercy. This is understood by the steward who now can act to save himself and preserve his honor and status in the village. Is this a character flaw in the master? He needs to find out quickly.

INSIGHTS INTO MEANING: The master and his honor in the village is saved, but his trust of the steward is lost forever. The master commends the "dis-honest steward" because he acted "shrewdly", because he was clever and worked the system to his own benefit. Jesus commends him because in his darkest hour he devised a plan taking into account his master's mercy, and it worked. The locals praise the generous master and he is highly honored. Money cannot buy that kind of public honor and praise. The steward may have heard from the master a hearty "well played sir" at the end of the parable. The steward is out of a job, but the village folk will see him as an agent of blessing and will respond accordingly. This is Jesus at his parable best! Jesus is making it clear here, that to be cut off from the community and isolated, is a dangerous state to be in. To stay in relationship to the community was the safety net of the first century. In this culture everyone relied on each other to be cared for. Participation in community is the highest good, over money and over the law. This parable illustrates Jesus' path of mercy to keep everyone in the community connected to each other. This is the state of blessing and abundance that should be offered to everyone. Hearts engaged in mercy and generosity ensure this. This is what it means to serve God - to care about the good and the well-being of the whole community.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: How might you as a family work to participate more fully in creating mealtime together?

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: TEAMWORK
INCLUSION

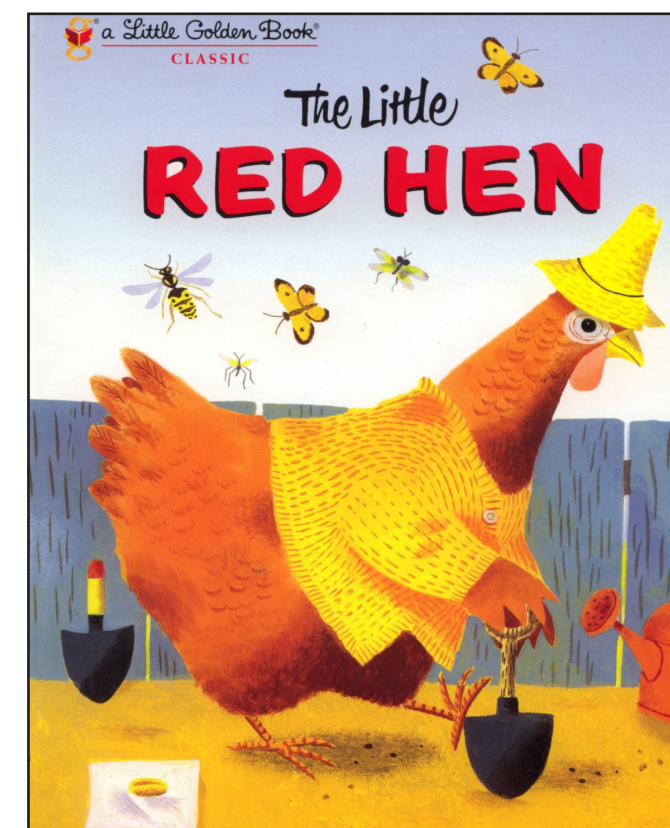
ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES: 1) As a family, discuss whether you think there are other people that you know who might want the joy and fullness you experience as a family in coming to mass together? How can you invite them this year - and not give up?

2) Sign up as a family to go along with a Eucharistic minister to take communion to the sick. Discern whether this is a ministry you might be called to as a family.

Cycle C 25th Sunday
Ordinary Time

Living Grace

"WHICH WORLD DO YOU SERVE?"



*In **The Little Red Hen**, the hen finds some wheat and asks for help from the other farmyard animals to plant it, but they all refuse. At each later stage - harvest, threshing, milling the wheat into flour, and baking the flour into bread - the hen again asks for help from the other animals, but again she doesn't receive any help. Finally, the hen has completed her task and asks who will help her eat the bread. This time, all the previous non-participants eagerly volunteer to join her, but she refuses them, stating that no one helped her with her work. Thus, the hen eats the bread with her chicks, leaving none for anyone else. When the hen finishes she decides to give her friends another chance. She says that next time she would be happy to make enough bread for herself, her chicks, and her friends if her friends help her do the work. The friends happily agree with that idea and say, "We will".*

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



RICH AND POOR, OR WAR AND PEACE

Oil painting on wood by unknown Flemish master ~ 17th Century
Museum of Bread Culture ~ Ulm, Germany

EXPLORING THE ART:

Hunger and the misery that come with it have plagued civilization throughout history. Mankind's biggest suffering is chronic malnutrition and acute hunger - they are woven into the fabric of history. Norman Borlaug, received the Nobel peace prize in 1970, and questioned humankind's inability to learn from history in his laureate speech: "Civilization as it is known today could not have evolved, nor can it survive, without an adequate food supply. Yet food is something that is taken for granted by most world leaders despite the fact that more than half of the population of the world is hungry. Man seems to insist on ignoring the lessons available from history".

From the late Middle Ages until 1850 virtually every generation in Europe experienced a period of severe famine in their lifetime. Bread shortage was used synonymously for hunger. In 17th century Dutch history, the Golden Age, was a time of huge disparity between rich and poor. One of the most popular styles of painting was a special genre of ornate still life called, pronkstilleven (Dutch for 'ostentatious still life'), which emphasized abundance by depicting a diversity of objects, fruits, flowers, and dead game, often together with living people and animals. Therefore, the Rich and Poor, or War and Peace painting (above) was a very direct and rare commentary on the problem of hunger, malnutrition, and undernourishment, and their impact on the development of civilization.

REMEMBERING HUNGER

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 16:1-13

"A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.' He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' Then to another the steward said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.' The steward said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.' And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? **No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.**

Read-aloud video link:

THE LITTLE RED HEN

A Favorite Folk Tale ~ Illustrated by J.P. Miller

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

CHOOSING TO SERVE MONEY BRINGS A WORLD OF ISOLATION WHILE CHOOSING TO SERVE GOD CREATES MANY WAYS OF CONNECTION AND PARTICIPATION.

The story of *The Little Red Hen* is very helpful in understanding this difficult parable of the unjust steward. In the Gospel story, we meet a man who is very crafty. He has been caught mismanaging the rich man's property, seemingly for his own gain. The steward did not have either the strength or support to develop his own God given giftedness as a means to provision. He had been living off the giftedness of his master. When this is taken from him, he has nothing. This parable illustrates the emptiness and loss that can come when we selfishly grab from another. It is not the path to true happiness or security.

In our children's story, the Little Red Hen discovers a great find - a grain of wheat! This gift is given to her from the earth - a gift of God the Creator - and it is free. She does not steal or rely on another. In her enthusiasm she invites others to participate in cultivating this free gift. Duck, Goose, Cat and Pig are too busy doing their own thing. All are preoccupied with their own activities. Their refusals do not stop the Little Red Hen from continuing to invite, and invite, and invite. In many ways the Little Red Hen is a lot like God. He keeps inviting, and inviting, and inviting us to a life of full participation. To enter into participation we have to drop our plans. Sound familiar? (Peter and Andrew...drop your fishing nets and come follow me.) In doing so, we open our hearts and souls to a path of receptivity and giving. On this path, we grow into our best selves. Our lives become full of meaning and purpose with others. We become nourished, and we grow.

But like the other animals in the story, sometimes we choose to do work only to benefit ourselves. This is what Jesus means when he says that we can not serve God and money. When we lead a life focused on our acquisitions and personal activities, it will lead us to a life of isolation. When we make choices that are "all about me", that is what we get, "me" and little else. What will the Little Red Hen do in the future? Will she give up or keep on inviting? She might need a few more clever tricks to reach out to those who in their selfishness, go hungry and thirsty. Jesus encourages us through this parable to not grow weary of finding ways to invite others into the life of full participation. This gospel calls us to take the word of Jesus seriously here, and get crafty about inviting all to come to the table. What will we do?

Joy is the fruit of all things being restored. God's rule of love is that all shall be restored. When mercy is the path to the heart for those that are lost, then the fruits of true peace and joy will be restored - that is God's "norm"!

On this path of receptivity and grace we grow into our best selves. Our lives become full of meaning and purpose with others. We become nourished, and we grow. As we serve as full participants in God's gifts, we have so much to share!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: When you are asked to help get dinner ready do you come up with excuses? What are some of them? What would it look like if you put on an apron and got in the kitchen to help? How would the dinner turn out? Would it make a difference in how you enjoy it as a family? What would the differences look like?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: Have you heard this story before? Which character do you identify with? Where does the Little Red Hen get the wheat from? Did she buy it? What does she do with it for herself? For others? What are the results?

THE GOSPEL STORY: What does this parable teach us about choosing money and taking care of ourselves only? Where does it lead us? Do you ever wonder about the importance and role of money in your life? What about the importance of food? Where does food come from? Is it limited? Why? What are some gifts that God has surrounded you with that money can't buy? How do you share in them with others? What are the results?

How does it make you feel when you gather around the table of the Lord on Sundays at mass? Do you think you know others that might be hungry for what our faith community has? Jesus is talking about when love and mercy are the rule.