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The Community Church of Issaquah
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“Possessing Possessions”

Luke 16:1-13

I’m a salesman’s daughter, and I love a good deal.

Right now, I’m finding all of my good deals on craigslist. When I moved from Dallas to Portland last summer I literally FedExed twelve boxes home, and those boxes and a bedside table are the extent of my worldly possessions.

I’m about, however, to move into a house, and I don’t want it to be completely bare, so I’ve turned to the highly addictive craigslist.com. Craigslist is like an online garage sale where people post furniture and cars and services they’re wanting to sell. You can find the BEST deals on there. It’s crazy. I’m talkin’ Pottery Barn. I’m talkin’ Crate and Barrel. And I’m talkin’ dirt cheap... if you look long enough.

It’s soooo fun. But what I’ve found the last few weeks is that this very fun purchasing of possessions has begun to consume me. Finding just the right chair for just the right price has sucked hours and hours out of my day. There have been a couple of

days that I’ve not even gone on my evening walk because I’ve been clicking on craigslist through kitchen carts.

I don’t know what it is about possessions, but *our possessions can very easily start possessing us.*

To that Jesus says: “You cannot serve both God and mammon.” To the suck and draw of mammon Jesus says NO.

You know, sometimes the Word of God just grips you with how true and good it is—and it done that this week for me. It’s so simple: you can either serve mammon or you can serve God. Mammon is simply an Aramaic word for possessions or property or more generally, wealth. We get frothed up and frantic about what the world deems necessary—possessions like clothes, property like cars, wealth like savings accounts—and then the Word of God comes and anchors us down into solid ground. You cannot serve both God and possessions. I cannot serve both God and craigslist. God’s

word reaches down the rabbit holes of our lives and pulls us back up to the surface.

Our possessions possess us. Our possessions can all too easily begin taking over our lives. We slide that credit card or hand over that cash and feel powerful for a moment...but anyone who has ever had buyers remorse or a house crammed with things they don't need can tell you...the need to own can start crowding out being able to actually live our lives.

We're in a possessions-loving pickle...but Jesus then says, if you struggle with possessions, if you struggle with the desire to own, if you struggle with wanting more and more, the solution is: *take that money and use it to make friends for eternity.*

Take that money and use it to make friends for eternity.

What could Jesus mean by that? In typical Jesus fashion, Jesus chooses to tell a parable that at first glance seems to make NO SENSE. He tells us the story of the dishonest steward who is praised by his master for being dishonest.

This steward has just been fired by the master. Now being a steward in charge of as much as he was in charge of would have meant a lot of status in the local community—and it would have also meant free room and board. The steward stands to lose a lot. But the steward is shrewd. He knows how relationships work.

Back in Jesus' day, relationships were largely formed by the patronage system where economics and friendship went hand-in-hand—not that they ever do that today. The patronage system was where a wealthy patron would give money or resources to a client—basically someone who was poorer than he was. In exchange the client was indebted to the patron, owes the patron favors and is grateful for the patron's generosity.

Interestingly enough, the Romans would call the patron the “superior friend” and the client the “lesser friend.” If you had an acquaintance who was on a similar economic level that person would be an “equal friend.”

When the steward reduces the loan agreements of the debtors—which

by the way he does so very substantially—he in effect puts all of the debtors into *his* debt. He becomes a patron of sorts and the debtors will now owe him favors—favors that will ensure that he will continue to have room, board and social status.

The steward has shrewdly taken how the world works—the system of patronage, this system of favors and debt—and has formed lasting relationships out of it.

Now it seems at first glance that Jesus is holding this steward up as an example to follow. But that would make no sense! The steward is dishonest! He defrauds the master, and he games the system.

Is Jesus saying that Christians are supposed to be the Bernie Madoffs of the world? Shrewd, dishonest and willing to imperil other people's stability for their own gain? Most definitely not.

But there is something that Jesus does want us to learn from the steward. See, the steward lives his life in light of the future. He forms his relationships in light of that future. Even though we might not

agree with the way he forms those relationships, he is at least living cognizant of the things to come. He is zoned in on the long game. With what is coming in mind, he uses his knowledge of the world to make *friends*.

What Jesus is saying is that this guy acted in the present in light of the future. He saw what was going to come—either heavy labor or being forced to beg—and he figured out how to live in the present to prepare for the future.

That is what Christians are called to do. We're not called to be dishonest. And we're definitely not called to go around putting people in our debt. But we are called to be awake to the future that is in front of us and to act in the present in light of that future.

This is where it ties back to possessions. See what is our future? Our future isn't that we're going to be turned out on the street to beg like the steward's future might have been. Our future is a future with God. Our future is the kingdom of heaven. Our future is what the disciples got a taste of in the book of Acts where everyone shared what

they had and held all of their possessions in *common*.

This is the future we have to live in NOW. We have to use what we have to prepare for what is to come. We have to be like the steward, live with the future in mind and use our possessions for the sake of PEOPLE.

If we don't want our possessions to start possessing us we have to live in the light the kingdom of God where we fish for people and not possessions.

It's hard work though to remember that we're about people not possessions. I was reminded of that a few years ago when everything happened in Ferguson and Michael Brown was shot and there were all of the protests.

One of the things I heard a lot during that time was about how the people protesting were looting buildings. Usually, the conversations I heard were about half about the issue at hand and half about the looting. That was really disturbing to me as a pastor.

Now I'm not saying it was *right* that those buildings were damaged, but

what I am saying is why did we so often focus on those *possessions* and not the *people*? Property was looted, but a person *died*. If we live with eternity in mind, it's the people that matter. It's the people whose souls can live or die. Buildings can be rebuilt. Bodies really can't.

Our possessions only matter in so much as the serve people. Buildings don't matter like souls matter. If God knows when a sparrow falls, doesn't God care infinitely more when human beings falls?

I would hope that the church of God—the people who live in light of eternity—would not be focused on possessions but would be focused on the people

I wonder. What would it *look* like for us to be focused on people and not possessions? How could we as a church use our possessions both individually and corporately to make friends for eternity? How can we practice the kind of foresight that the steward had and live into the kingdom of God where all possessions are used to support people?

How could this space right here be used to make friends for eternity?

I think we're about to that in a couple of weeks. At Salmon Days we're going to be passing out water. That is chance to serve people, but even more than that it's a chance to make friends. To get to know people. To let them get to know us.

There are so many opportunities for us to use what we have—whether we have a lot or a little—to make friends with other people. If we have food, can we invite someone over for a meal? If we have a car, can we drive someone to an appointment?

Serving God and not mammon means that we use our possessions to make friends for ever. Serving God and not mammon means that when I buy furniture for my house on craigslist, it's not so much the cutest table or sofa I'm after, but rather the table that is able to host the most people around it for lunch after church and the sofa that is comfiest for long talks with good friends.

Our possessions don't have to

possess us. If we serve God, if our eyes are on eternity and the friendships and people that matter most in God's sight, our possessions can be the gift that they were meant to be.

Thank God for that. Thank God we don't have to pile up possessions. Thank God that it's people who are precious in his sight not property. Thank God that we can be God's people. Amen.