

5 August 2007
The Ninth Sunday after Trinity, BCP

I have said it before and I say it again, our Lord's words are so often unpredictable and surprising, no more so than today: *Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*

What are we to make of this apparently 'anything goes, the end justifies the means, free-market' message?

The retired Bishop of Derby, Jonathan Bailey, once said to me that in his opinion, the parables were intended to give a simple message, and the worst thing we could do with them was try and see something of significance in their every detail. In other words, they were not allegories. Good speakers choose details of their stories to suit the audience, so we need to interpret them in the light of this and then apply the message to our own circumstances. This is so with all Holy Scripture, and it is difficult, especially with Paul's letters since we can never be certain what provoked him to write them.

So, it is not the detail that matters, rather the message. And what is the message of this morning's gospel? It seems to me that it is quite straightforward:

- Use what comes your way to plan for the future.
- Use the means of the culture in which you are placed to further the cause of right.
- The steward was commended by the master for his audacity, so take risks. David took risks with Goliath: it worked.
- Don't be lazy, no need to take things lying down.

This is much like the parable of the talents: make good use of what comes your way.

Paul this morning tells us about the need to choose wisely, so using what comes our way to plan for the future, depends on our choosing the right kind of plan. And the danger it is so easy to fall into is to think that we've got it right.

How do we get it right: that is the question. I am the person least qualified to preach at anyone: I can only tell you about my mistakes. Perhaps that is how we seek right: by recognizing mistakes for what they are, and keep trying anew.

So be shrewd, be crafty for Christ, but never be complacent.