

Sermon The Parable of the Dishonest Manager (the one about *elachistos* – insignificant)
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 9.21.25

Amos 8:4-7

Psalm 113

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Luke 16:1-13

I've been ordained for 18 years. I've had five opportunities to preach on the parable of the dishonest manager. I have not. Today is the sixth opportunity and, because I care about you (and you help me stretch as a priest), I'm going to give it a shot. Luke wrote this story and has a variety of idioms and several occasions to transliterate Aramaic/Hebrew words into Greek (he wrote the whole Gospel in Greek). That alone makes it difficult to translate into 21st century English. But, we have to add in the allegory mixed with contrasting principles to make things even more interesting. And this is why I have not preached on it before. So, in summary, here it is: you know the phrase thick-as-thieves. They have a common interest – stealing from other people – so as long as they keep that common interest at heart, they'll be friends. You also know the phrase den-of-thieves. Likewise, a den of thieves is a place where thieves feel comfortable because no one is going to turn them in. I think Jesus was saying that the Church needs to act as thick-as-thieves with one another. Our den of thieves, if you will, is the church itself. We have a common interest – peace with God and one another – and we share that with others. But, unlike a den of thieves, we are children of the light. We are bringing joy and peace and unity. And, like the dishonest manager that made friends by cutting deals with his boss's vendors (who will welcome him into their homes because he made deals with them), the Children of the Light will be welcome into God's eternal home.

What I'd like to spend our time on today is one of the most profound statements ever written. It is this: Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful in much.

That is a universal truth, if you will, that is repeated in different locations and in different times on the earth but always has them same result. For instance, if you want to be a teacher, you first start with a small group of students and then it grows. A nurse starts with a small group of patients and then it grows. Same with an accountant, a road worker, a chef, and a judge. ... oh, and a priest. It has secular meaning as well as spiritual significance. When God calls you to do something, it's usually small. And, if you do it well, you get something bigger. God will see if you are faithful in a little and then hand you more and more.

I don't like the phrase "very little" so I looked up what word Luke wrote in Greek. The word is this: *elachistos*. There are several words in English that it can translate to. For our purposes with the New Testament, I believe "insignificant" is the best translation. Interestingly enough, it is used seldomly in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul wrote, "I am the *elachistos* of the apostles." I am the insignificant Apostle. St. James wrote in his letter that the rudder, although *elachistos*, can steer the ship. If you imagine all the large parts of a ship, yes, the rudder is insignificant; but, it plays a highly significant role. The last one is my favorite. From Matthew 25, Jesus said at the end of the age the King will separate the righteous from unrighteous. To the righteous he will say, "Welcome into my kingdom because when I was hungry/thirsty/sick/in

prison you took care of me.” The people will say, “When did we see you hungry/thirsty, etc?” The King will answer them, “When you did it to the elachistos, you did it to me.”

Here is how we could use elachistos in our day and time. When I looked up to the night sky, and saw all the stars, I felt elachistos. When I look out at the Gulf, and see the vastness of the sea, I feel elachistos. When I stand in line at the DMV, I feel elachistos.

The good news, the exciting news, is that God sees the elachistos. God sees when we are faithful with the insignificant, when we care for the insignificant, and rewards us! God pays attention to the elachistos. Some would even say that God identifies with the elachistos!

If you have ever been somewhere, like the DMV or the ER, or any other place with acronyms to describe it, and you felt ignored or unworthy, God sees you differently. Many people tell me when they first came to All Angels, they did not feel elachistos but welcomed and loved. And that’s what we are called to do. Sure, our church is not the biggest church in the area and may, to some, look insignificant. But, we are significant in what we do. For instance, some of you gave money to the church with the intention that we’d send it to people who need it after the flash flood in Texas. Those people who gave would call the amount elachistos; but, adding it all together, those gifts had an effect that fed 100 people for a month. Faithful in a little, faithful in much.

One last thing, I got a note this past week from someone who participates on line with All Angels. She’s working, full time, and caring for her aging parents. The amount of time she has to worship God is, well, elachistos. But, the effect of her watching every week, the small amount of time she offers, is enough to give her spiritual energy for the week. That is what you, and your participation at All Angels, and your gifts, this is what it does. It may look insignificant, but to God, and to many others, it is much and it is profound.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.