

There is something poignant about gathering in church to offer prayers on the eve of the funeral for Queen Elizabeth II. Apart from it being a historic event, it is important that we offer our prayers, because it connects us to others. Offering our prayers connects us to a world outside of ourselves, connects us to a divine mystery that we call God, and connects us to a communion of saints that now Queen Elizabeth has joined.

In the epistle we are invited to offer prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings for everyone, particularly for those in positions of leadership and authority, “so that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.” If that’s the purpose of praying, then clearly we need to *keep* praying because there are many people who don’t lead quiet and peaceable lives.

In the gospel reading there are people who are in debt to a master; and a manager who is about to lose his job for squandering his master’s money. Neither position is a very attractive place to be. Far from quiet and peaceable, in both positions there is an immense amount of shame and powerlessness.

The manager decides to take the extraordinary risk of reducing the debt of his master’s debtors by 50 and 20 percent, in the hopes that they might welcome him into their homes after he has lost his job. It is an extraordinary act of extravagance that would leave the debtors in deep gratitude. For this he is commended.

The story is intended to remind us of another story of squandering and indebtedness. The story about two sons who receive their inheritance, and the younger son, like the manager in this story, squanders his father’s estate until he is left with nothing. The only thing he can think of doing, after he has lost his job and lost all his money, is go back to his father and beg that he be made equal to one of his father’s hired hands. In other words he will *lose* his status as a son, and become like a slave.

We know what happens. The father welcomes the younger son back with open arms, puts sandals on his feet and a ring on his finger and throws a lavish banquet, exclaiming “this son of mine was lost and is found, was dead and is alive!” Meanwhile, the older son, who has never enjoyed any such banquet, and is much more responsible, refuses to attend the banquet and denies that his brother even exists.

Here, the master commends the dishonest manager for acting shrewdly, “for the children of this age are more

shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.” So, Jesus says, “make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, so when it is gone, they may welcome you into eternal homes.”

The whole impetus for Jesus telling these stories is that he was being criticized for eating and drinking with the wrong people: the tax collectors and sinners. These are the people who were “in debt”, who, like the younger son or the manager, had lost their jobs. They were shamed. They had no status. They were seen as irresponsible because they had squandered everything. And yet, these are the people that Jesus was eating and drinking with. These are the people that Jesus honours.

In the story of the two sons, the father is affirming an unbroken relationship with the son no matter how bad things get. “You are my son. Everything I have is yours.”

In the story of the dishonest manager, the master is affirming a reputation of generosity.

If your bank manager calls you this week, and asks, “How much do you owe on that mortgage?” And you answer, “\$800,000”, and the manager says, “Sit down and make it \$400,000.” Apart from being astounded, you will start saying to your friends, “Get your

mortgage at this bank, because they will give a good deal!” At the end of the day, the bank gets a generous reputation, it attracts more business, and the branch manager keeps his job. The father, in the story of the two sons, and the master, in the story of the dishonest manager, are both extravagantly generous, with seemingly limitless resources. What’s important to them is that *everyone* knows this.



The God we serve is far from stingy, keeping strict accounts of when you slip up, but rather is lavishly generous. The God we serve offers open arms when you come back home to say, “I have spent everything and am no longer worthy to gather up the crumbs under your table.” *Then* you receive sandals, rings, the best robe

and a great banquet. Instead of being disowned and ashamed you are lifted up and honoured. The God we serve cancels debts rather than demands repayment. And our response is deep gratitude. So, if this is who we serve, then our hearts, our lives, our resources are spent with a lavish generosity. Because whoever is faithful in little is faithful in much.