

Proper 20 Year C

Do any of you remember how the Phillies got off to a great start this year, and how by May they already had a comfortable lead in their division? That is, until during one game, a camera man noticed that the Phillies bullpen coach in center field was sporting binoculars and was apparently stealing the pitch signs and getting them to the Phillie hitters so they would know what pitch was coming.

It is hard to determine cause and effect, but immediately after adamant denials, the Phillies simply stopped hitting for three months and fell out of first place until recently.

So here's the question: by using those binoculars, were they cheating or were they being inventive?

I remembered this because, just the other night, Derek Jeter of the Yankees was hitting, a pitch came in very close, Jeter did a very animated dance of the wounded, and the umpire awarded him first base.

The problem is that slow motion replays showed clearly that the ball never touched him. It actually hit his bat and thus should've been a strike.

So here's the question: by faking that he was hit, was Jeter cheating or being crafty?

I give you these examples from the world of baseball because it would be easy to hear that gospel lesson for this morning and take it to mean that we should be dancing with that line between craftiness and dishonesty.

Jesus said, "Make friends for yourself by dishonest wealth...If you have not been faithful with dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"

Is Jesus really encouraging us to be dishonest? Does Jesus have your attention now?

Let me take a moment to say that our Adult Ed Lecture Series, which begins Oct 24, is called "Those Perplexing Parables," where we will explore passages like this one which seems to be sending a disturbing message. How can the same Jesus who gave us the Golden Rule hold up this dishonest manager as some kind of example?

Well, the key to understanding this kind of story is a rhetorical principal that was common for 1st Century Jewish teachers, but is less so for 21st Century Americans.

The technique is called "From lesser to greater." Jesus is not saying that we should cheat in order to get a competitive edge, he's saying that if the children of this age, as he calls them, are shrewd in their dealings, how much more should the children of light be shrewd in their dealings.

How much more should the children of light be imaginative, creative, forward thinking, and inventive.

But isn't it true that we Christians tend to excel instead in the maintenance of the Status Quo? After all, how many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb? Two. One to change the bulb and one to talk about how much better the old bulb was! Please God, may it not be so here at Christ Church. There are two truths that emerge for me from this gospel.

The first is obviously that we followers of Christ here at Christ Church, I than need to grow accustomed to thinking new thoughts and seeking new ways to serve the Lord.

And today we have a good example.

Last October, Ruth Johnson, a caterer who belongs to St. Mary's Ardmore, saw the little used food closet in that parish and knew that there was certainly a greater need for food than what they were seeing.

So she moved the pantry into the kitchen, contacted suppliers, started a garden for fresh produce, recruited volunteers to work set hours of operation and the Ardmore food pantry has gone in one year from

feeding a handful of people to serving 780 people last month. The ministry has taken off so much that they now need help.

At the same time about a year ago Dodie Tague of this parish was interested in getting our food pantry going again, but found that we are not near enough to public transportation so that those in need can get to us.

Then Dodie met Ruth Johnson, brought news of Ruth's remarkable ministry back to our Ministries Task Force, and then we got it; we will join the Ardmore Food Pantry, and today is our first Food Ingathering because always get low on food at the end of the month.

Simple and creative, the food will actually get to the people who need it, and we become a bit more aware of others.

So what will be next? Remember, the last 7 words of a dying church are "we never did it that way before" and the first 6 words of a thriving church are "Here am I Lord, send me."

The second truth I take from this gospel is drawn from that rhetorical principal "From Lesser to Greater."

It is a little scary to try new things. After all, what if we fail?

Well the lesser to greater principal applies: If God has sustained and guided us from the beginning of our lives to this moment, how much more can we be assured that God will sustain and guide us through this day and through all the uncertainties of life.

Because we don't usually know where God will lead, but we know that the same Lord who calls us to follow him, and to bring our imaginations with us, will be with us now and in the future just as he has been with us all along.

The God who got us to this day is the God who will get us through this day. Amen