

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine, they lay down for the night, and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. "Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see." Watson replied, "I see millions and millions of stars." "What does that tell you?" Holmes asked. Watson pondered for a minute. "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, I can see that God is all-powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you?" Holmes was silent for a minute, then spoke. "Watson, you idiot. Somebody has stolen our tent!"

A portion of the Appalachian trail runs through New Jersey. Every year, through-hikers carrying their tents make their way from Georgia to Maine over the course of several months. They live out their days carrying everything they need on their backs, camping each night in tents, either alone or with companions they have met on the way. A trek of this magnitude is often life-changing, and re-entering our world after having been out in nature for many months, is difficult. AT folks long to be outside. The indoor routines we have all become accustomed to feel too confined and narrow to those coming off the trail, even though the niceties of having a shower, sleeping in a bed, and enjoying a good home-cooked meal are worth coming inside for.

The manager in this morning's story was in charge of his boss' home—of everything that was connected with his home and business. But, he wasn't dealing honestly and was squandering his boss' wealth, so his boss was about to fire him. The manager realized that the only thing he was able to do was be a manager—that his whole identity and life was tied to his being a manager, and it was about to be taken away. He was going to lose not only his livelihood, but his identity, as well. So, he makes friends by reducing the bills each of the debtors owe, and instead of getting fired, the boss praises him for being shrewd.

Jesus seems to be telling us to make sure we make friends, at least, so that when our dependence on money fails, we will have friends who can take us into their homes. These aren't just any home: these are eternal homes in the

sense of tent: a dwelling that isn't permanent because the inhabitants have to be ready to strike the tent and pitch it again in order to keep up with wherever God is leading them. "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." He's always on the move, reaching out to the lonely, the sick, the needy, the grieving, and the imprisoned, and he's inviting us to come with him as his partners in building the kingdom of God.

He seems to be telling us to use our skills and to carry out our responsibilities with excellence so that as we keep discovering that there is more to life than accumulating wealth, we can transfer that same excellence to loving God through serving others with integrity, faithfulness and honesty.

"No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

This makes perfect sense, but when we try to live by it, it is exceedingly difficult. We **do** put our trust in money. Money pays for things we need and it pays for things we long for. Money is a good thing. Not having enough of it causes hunger, sickness, and homelessness. There is nothing attractive about poverty and its consequences. We want to avoid becoming homeless at all costs. Most of us have had the experience of living close to the edge and of being one paycheck away from getting not making the rent or the mortgage. All it would take would be for too many unexpected expenses to occur in the same time frame: the car breaks down, someone gets sick, a child starts college, and the roof is leaking. We want to pad our savings account with enough to protect us from these circumstances, and it seems like we can never have enough padding.

So, how do we move from worry and anxiety to trust? Paradoxically, the more we give, the more it seems we have. Deciding to use our wealth for the benefit of others is astonishingly liberating. We can also let ourselves be inspired by other people's generosity. I know a small boy who went with his parents to a fundraiser. Pledges were being received for the start of an inner city school that would serve underprivileged youth. He had just received \$400.00 from his grandmother. When it was time to offer whatever we could to help start the

school, this little boy grabbed an envelope and carefully wrote his name on the form. Next to it he wrote, \$200.

When I asked him why he wanted to give away half of his gift, he replied, “They need it more than I do.” That’s an admirable start in the move toward trust. If only we could know that no matter what happens to us, God loves us, and that with this love, we have everything. Yet, the only way to really know this is to try out different ways of putting our trust in God. It’s by entrusting those we love into God’s loving care, as well. If God is great and good enough to take care of us, God is great and good enough to take care of everyone we love. We still get to practice what we love with excellence, except now, rather than doing it for our own gain, we are letting it serve God and God’s beloved.