Money is very much in the news these days. We are all hearing a great deal about inflation, rising interest rates, a gyrating market and the cost of health care and other public services. Many individuals and families face serious challenges when it comes to the cost of food and of housing especially in large cities like Toronto.

We all need a certain amount of money if we are going to be able to provide for ourselves and our families. A large number of Institutions and organizations in Canada and elsewhere depend on donations in order to fulfill their mandates – hospitals and health care more generally, universities and research institutes, the arts in all their many forms.

Money can also be abused. As common as that has always been true, it seems to be even more the case in the kind of consumer-oriented culture in which we live. For some people, money and what money can buy become so important that they are willing to sacrifice health, family and their integrity in pursuit of them. The apostle Paul seems to be thinking of something like that when he identifies greed with idolatry.

Although all four Gospels raise issues about money and especially about great wealth, Luke does it more often than the others. He alone among the evangelists has the parable of a poor man named Lazarus who lies at a rich man’s gate and begs for food only to be callously disregarded by him. The parable we just heard is also found only in Luke. It too has to do with money and possessions. At the beginning of the parable, a manager of what may have been a great estate is charged with squandering the property and goods of the owner. The rest of the parable focuses on the manager and on his actions. Confronted by the master and accused of squandering the master’s property, the manager loses his position and the income attached to it.

Seeing himself as too weak to dig and too proud to beg, the manager is obliged to seek support in some other way. By rewriting the amount of debt owed by a number of individuals to the master, the manager succeeds in developing relationships that will be of help to him in the future. His solution is dishonest but effective. When the master hears what the manager has done, he commends him for his cleverness. “The children of this age,” he says, “are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

The master is not commending the manager for his dishonest use of what is owed to the master in order to win the friendship of a number of the master’s debtors. What Jesus is commending in the parable is the shrewdness of the man in discovering a way to guarantee his financial future.

What Jesus is saying in the parable can be applied in a variety of ways to ourselves. It raises questions about trust, deceit and greed, questions, too, about our values and how committed we are to them. It is one thing to say or to think that we are good Christians and yet live in ways that do little more than reflect the dominant values and concerns of our culture, both good and bad. If we want to be serious about our commitments, something more is needed. At the very least we should periodically think about them and about whether and how they are having a positive impact on our daily life.

The reading ends with a well known saying of Jesus. “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.”

There is a sense in which we have many masters in the course of our lives, many situations and people who make demands on us of one kind or another. The emphasis in what Jesus says here and elsewhere in the Gospels is on our ultimate concerns, on God and God’s will for us, on what it means to be a person of faith, on the nature of our commitment to Jesus and to the way of life to which he calls us.

A key test for judging the quality of our Christian commitment is the way in which we treat one another. What that entails can be formulated in different ways. Jesus once summed up the Mosaic Law in the twofold love of God and love of neighbour. Elsewhere he urges us to be merciful as the heavenly Father is merciful. In Matthew’s vision of the end times, the criterion according to which we will be judged will be whether or not we have reached out in helpful ways to the hungry and the thirsty, the sick and the homeless, the poor and the imprisoned.

To think of these and other Gospel sayings and to allow them to influence our actions is to be shrewd in relation to the values that we as Christians profess.