

My friend Janet makes black bean brownies.

Now, the first time I heard that, I thought I had misunderstood her. Brownies are supposed to be chocolate and sugar and butter. I mean, who wakes up in the morning and says, “You know what these brownies need? Legumes.” But, then you try one, and oh my goodness! — it actually works. They. Are. Delicious. And you even get to tell yourself they’re healthy.

That’s pretty shrewd, isn’t it? Black bean brownies. A very clever workaround. Taking what you’ve got and slipping something good in, especially when no one expects it. A little creative resistance against the stubbornness of kids — and adults — who don’t want to eat their beans.

So, when I hear Jesus tell this strange parable of the shrewd manager, I can’t help but think of Janet’s sneaky recipe. Here’s a man caught in a corrupt system, about to lose his job, who finds a way to bend the rules so that people’s debts get cut and consequently, he has friends that will be willing to take him in. It’s not exactly ethical, but none the less Jesus says, “Now that’s clever.” Not because dishonesty is holy, but because the man used imagination in a situation that was stacked against him. If people can be that creative just to protect themselves, Jesus seems to say, how much more should my disciples be clever for the sake of God’s kingdom?

Tomorrow is the feast day of the apostle Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector, someone whose very livelihood depended on a corrupt and exploitive system. In *The Chosen*, a fictionalized series based on the Gospels, Matthew is portrayed as socially awkward, precise, brilliant with numbers, but painfully aware of how despised he is. He knows his job is corrupt, he knows people hate him for doing it, and yet he keeps on because it’s what he knows. But it’s safe, and in some way it makes sense to him. That is, until Jesus comes by, looks him in the eye, and says, “Follow me.”

And Matthew does the unthinkable. He leaves the booth behind.

That moment is powerful because you can feel the tension. He’s torn between the world he knows, corrupt as it is, and the new world Jesus is opening before him. What stands out isn’t just that he’s willing, but that he’s resilient enough to face himself honestly and be open to change. He doesn’t double down on the system that paid him. He takes the risk of stepping into something new, even though he doesn’t quite understand why or what he is even getting himself into.

And resilience doesn’t stop with Matthew. The other disciples had to learn resilience, too. We can imagine they weren’t exactly thrilled to see a despised tax collector join their company. He didn’t fit their picture of a disciple. He was an ingredient they did not expect — the beans in the brownie. But the Spirit was in the midst of all this, guiding Matthew in his growth as a follower of Jesus and guiding the others as they worked through their resentments. Over time, they discovered that he was indeed a necessary ingredient of the recipe, integral to the ministry, one of the twelve. It’s

likely he used his skills of analysis for the good of Jesus' mission. Tradition even remembers him as the one who gave us a Gospel. Whether he wrote it himself or whether the Gospel grew out of the community that carried his name, the point is the same: the one nobody expected, ended up feeding generations.

And isn't that also the Spirit's work in us? To make us resilient — willing to look inside ourselves, to adapt and change into disciples ourselves. In this Season of Creation that growing discipleship is calling us to see how entangled we are in systems that wound creation, and, in turn, how that hurts the poorest people living on this planet. And just as the disciples had to learn to stretch their imaginations to include Matthew, we are asked to stretch our imaginations and our habits to learn new ways of living faithfully on this earth.

That's why hearing the words of 20th-century eco-theologian, Sallie McFague, matter so much to us today. Her's was one of the earliest and clearest voices to insist that our theology and our ecology belong together. She spent her career trying to help Christians see creation differently. She believed the metaphors we use for God and creation shape the way we live, and she wanted to give the church new images big enough to meet the urgency of our times. She knew that if we kept referring to our earth just as "resources" or "property," we'd keep treating her that way.

One of McFague's most powerful images is this:

*"We should see the world as God's body, a sacrament of the divine, a physical reality that is both loved and inhabited by God."*¹

Think about that. The air we breathe, the rivers that flow, the forests and creatures — God's own body. Not scenery. Not raw material. Sacrament. Which means when we pollute the air, we scar God's lungs. When we poison the water, we wound God's veins. When we cut down the forests, we slash into God's flesh. And it also means that every act of care — planting a tree, participating in reuse and recycling, speaking out for change — is not just environmental activism. It is sacramental. It is loving God's body.

And sometimes that love looks like clever resistance, like gaming the system for good. I think of solar panels, sprouting up on church rooftops and even on top of parking lots. Instead of acres of pavement soaking up the sun, cooking cars, and wasting energy, congregations are using those same square feet to capture light and feed it back into the grid. A roof that once just kept out the rain becomes a visible sign of God's people choosing life.

¹ McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (1993):

Or take student lunch debt. Some schools shame kids whose accounts run dry, giving kids a lesser grade of meal or even taking their meals away. Community groups pool money to quietly pay off lunch debts so no child is embarrassed for being poor. It's the system turned inside out, mercy sneaking in through the cracks. It caring for Christ's body.

These are glimpses of the same invitation: to stop saying, "What good can just one of us do?," and start asking, "What holy mischief can we pull off together?" And that takes resilience — the courage to change our own habits, the awareness to see the needs around us, the patience to wrestle with our place in God's creation, and the willingness to stay open even when the world resists.

Creative and active resistance doesn't always look like chaining yourself to a pipeline or marching on Washington. Sometimes it looks smaller. Sometimes it looks like being sneaky— slipping something nourishing into a world determined to feed us junk. Like Janet, with her black bean brownies. The first time you think: no way. And then you taste one, and it's heaven. Taking what you've got, working around resistance, and finding a way to bring something life-giving, even when nobody expects it.

The shrewd manager in Jesus' story did it with debts. Janet does it with beans. Matthew did it by leaving his booth and following Jesus, even when nobody, including himself, thought he belonged. And Jesus is asking us to do it with our lives — to use our imagination, our cleverness, our resilience, and our holy mischief to bring mercy and justice into places that seem impenetrable. Because that's what the Spirit does: slips hope into despair, courage into fear, joy into exhaustion, and resurrection into death.

And just like Matthew, God can take our conflicted, compromised lives and turn us into bearers of Good News. For people, for the earth itself — for the very body of Christ.

And if you don't believe me about the black bean brownies, you can try one yourself at coffee hour. Shrewdness never tasted so sweet.

Amen.