

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 16:1-9: "We Work While It Is Day."
August 17/18, 2019 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O Lord and heavenly Father, who through Your Son our Savior taught us that we cannot serve both God and mammon: Deliver us, we pray You, from the love of money; and grant us grace to use wisely and faithfully all such possessions as You have entrusted to us, for the furtherance of Your kingdom, the relief of those in need, and the supply of our own necessities; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 115)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus] also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' / "And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' / "So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' / "Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' / "The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose saving light shines in the world through our clear confession of the Gospel and our humble service, dear fellow redeemed:

If we did not live at a time with access to electricity, our lives would be very different. All the things we rely on appliances for would need to be done by hand. There would be no digital screens to look at for work and entertainment. There would be no fixtures in place to flood each room with light. We could make use of oil lamps and candles. But for the most part our daily activities would be determined by the light of the sun and the occasional light of the moon.

In a scenario like this, it would be foolish for us to sleep until noon and stay up past midnight. By not using the daylight, we would squander our best working hours. It's much easier to work when everything is lit up and in view than trying to get things done in the darkness.

In today's text, we might say that the manager of the rich man's goods stumbled because he was doing his work in the darkness. We know the manager was wasting his master's possessions, but we do not know how. It could have been that he was lazy. Maybe he was too passive and not as involved in the work as he should have been. Possibly he was even embezzling some of his master's riches.

Of the little we know about him, we can say that the manager was most concerned about himself. When he was being relieved of his duties, he showed no remorse for his mismanagement. Instead he worried about keeping up his standard of living going forward. "What shall I do?" he said. "I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg." That's when he hatched the plan to mismanage his master's goods still further in a way that would benefit him personally.

He did not act nobly and honestly. He acted selfishly. It is the kind of behavior we might expect from an unbeliever with a dull conscience. You maybe know someone like this, someone who does not think twice about using others to get what he wants. He doesn't care about fairness or kindness or whether his actions cause harm as long as he succeeds. These are works done in darkness by someone who "does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1Jo. 2:11).

Believers in Christ, God's own children, are called to act differently. They are not to be concerned only about their own needs, but about the needs of their neighbors. And their goal is not to try to outdo or even just keep up with others in their materialism. Believers know that having the biggest house on the block, the nicest possessions, and the greatest wealth is not important. Those riches are fleeting and one day will belong to someone else or will be buried in a landfill.

What we are called to do in each of our vocations is to work honestly and diligently and be thankful for whatever God gives us. This is how "the sons of light" should conduct themselves. Jesus contrasts "the sons of light" with "the sons of this world." The "sons of light" are those who walk in the light of Jesus. They are not afraid or consumed with their own self-preservation like someone lost in deep darkness. They clearly see what is around them, both the good and bad. They see neighbors in need. They see the many blessings the Lord gives them along the way. They clearly see the path leading to the kingdom of everlasting light.

In these ways "the sons of light" have every advantage over "the sons of this world." The sons of this world do not know where they are going. They have no clear purpose. They have no clear goal. When they reach their earthly end, they are without hope. They ultimately find that all their dealing in the darkness resulted in no lasting good.

This shows how crucial it is for "the sons of light" to shine in the world's darkness. Jesus said, "[L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 5:16). We let our lights shine by supporting those around us and helping them keep what is theirs. We let our lights shine by being generous with what we have and sharing with those in need.

But the primary way we shine the light of Jesus in this dark world is by sharing the Gospel individually and by supporting the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments both locally and around the world. We have the means to break sinners free from the chains of sin! We have the answer for the troubled conscience and despairing heart! We have Jesus, who shed His blood to redeem all people and rose in victory over death and hell!

We have the greatest Treasure that mankind has ever known or ever could know! It is ours! But what have we done with this Treasure? Have we buried it so no one knows we have it? Have we acted like it was everything to us one day but cast it aside the next? Or have we given our time, our talents, and our treasures to promote the work of the Gospel?

Look at what the world does when it finds a cause worthy of its attention. Look at how much money and energy people commit to their health, to their hobbies, and to their entertainment. The *"sons of this world"* are relentless in their pursuit of their interests, their causes, and their pleasures. We should be just as relentless in our confession of the truth and in spreading the Gospel to all corners of the earth. This is the point Jesus wants us to take from today's text.

But first of all He says, *"For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light."* This is an indictment. Jesus is telling us that unbelievers are better at doing evil than we are at doing good. They are more shrewd about things that serve themselves than we are at things that serve our Lord and our neighbor. This is because sin is in us too. We know what is good, but we struggle to carry it out.

And yet, despite our mismanagement of the great riches God has given us, He has not removed us from our position. We are still *"sons of light"* by faith in Jesus. We are still His kinsmen. He claims us as His own. By His blood He has blotted out all of our wrongdoing. And by His righteous life He has credited to us all the good works we lacked.

He forgives us for the times we have been lazy about hearing and learning His Word, for the times we failed to speak up for the truth, for the times we sold out entirely and let sin overcome us. His perfect stewardship of God's holy gifts counts for all who are guilty of mismanagement. All sinners who trust in Him alone for their salvation will never have to experience the terror of standing before the righteous God and hearing Him give the eternal verdict, *"What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager."*

Because of what Jesus has done to save us, we have no work to do to get ourselves to heaven. But we do have work to do on earth. Jesus explains, *"I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."* Now take note that Jesus does not say, *"make friends for yourselves by unrighteous means,"* or by doing what unbelievers do, as though we should try to fit in with the world. He says to make friends by *"unrighteous wealth."*

"Unrighteous wealth" is another term for earthly riches. We are to be shrewd and wise with our earthly means, so that the things of God—the good and holy and pure things—are promoted. This does not mean every penny needs to go in the offering plate or to a charitable fund. It does not mean we must live in a leaking shelter and get by on one change of clothes and simple bread and water for every meal.

But we can do more with what God has given us. We can be better managers. We can cut back on some of the things that are less important and focus on what is more important. You could purchase Bibles or devotion books for family members or friends. You could contribute toward our college or seminary or other educational institutions in our fellowship. You could adopt a home or foreign mission that our synod oversees. You could support efforts to assist the poor and hurting with both their physical and their spiritual needs.

Jesus promises that these efforts will bear fruit. His Word does not return to Him void. And when your efforts are exhausted and your earthly end has come, Jesus says that those who heard the saving Word and believed it will *"receive you into the eternal dwellings."* They will welcome you into heaven, so that together you can praise God for His abundant grace and mercy.

In another place Jesus said, *"We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work"* (Joh. 9:4). As long as we are here, we have the privilege and responsibility of managing all the spiritual and earthly riches God gives us. Now is not the time for getting lazy or failing to utilize the light. **We Work While It Is Day.**

We work in the bright light of Jesus, who puts no heavy burden on our shoulders. He has done the heavy lifting for us and for all sinners by sacrificing Himself in our place. We work knowing that He forgives our failures, and that He will accomplish great things even through our humble efforts. God grant that we may be continuously diligent and joyful in this work. *Amen.*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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