

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Luke 16:1-9: “What Drives You?”
July 31/August 1, 2021 | 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. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who was driven to redeem us by enduring great suffering and offering up His holy life on the cross, dear fellow redeemed:

It seems strange that the master in this parable would praise the dishonest manager for anything. Not only had the manager wasted his master’s possessions in the past – a charge that the manager didn’t even try to refute. But now on the way out the door, the manager essentially stole from his master again. So why did his master praise him? Perhaps his reaction is reflected in the saying: “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.”

And why did the manager behave as he did? He may have had what he thought were good reasons for wasting his master’s possessions. Maybe the boss wasn’t very nice to his employees. Maybe he took advantage of a tight job market and paid less than he should have. Maybe he failed to reward his workers for going above and beyond. But however the manager tried to

justify his actions in his head, it was a perfectly appropriate response for his employer to show him the door. Bad behavior does not justify bad behavior. Or to use another saying: “Two wrongs don’t make a right.”

But I think I’m giving the manager more credit than he is due. He did not really have noble intentions. He took advantage of his situation. He deliberately mismanaged what belonged to another. Things didn’t get serious for him until his own financial security was threatened. Then he jumped into action! Physical labor wasn’t an option—that work was too hard. Begging was out of the question—he was too good for that. So he decided to dispense favors at his master’s expense. He made the debtors of his master indebted to him.

What we see in this parable is a picture of the way the ungodly conduct business. “*The sons of this world*” are driven by pride, greed, and self-preservation. The virtues of honesty, integrity, and loyalty mean next to nothing. Each of us is supposed to put ourselves first and to focus on what we deserve—or what we think we deserve—rather than on what we owe to others. We don’t have to look very hard to see the culture of entitlement that influences so many today.

That culture is even cultivated in the home. Jesus doesn’t include any backstory about the characters in His parable. But suppose the dishonest manager was taught to function like he did. Suppose he had the kind of parents that trained him to win at all costs, to push aside anyone who got in his way, to look at everyone as though they owed him something. Suppose they heard about what happened with his employer, and instead of chiding him, they congratulated him: “Good job, son! You got what you could. You turned things to your advantage. You showed him who was boss!”

I wonder how many athletes competing in the summer Olympics in Tokyo were raised like this. How many parents pushed their kids to be the best no matter what it took? One athlete who is known for her tactics of intimidation admitted that everything was a competition in her household growing up. She has a history of winning, but she’s probably never won a sportsmanship award. She was taught that winning is all that matters, no matter how many people you hurt or offend along the way.

But there are other athletes who compete hard and have success while still enjoying the respect and admiration of their opponents. That’s the kind of reputation we want our children to have. We want them to be known as honest, hard-working, and kind people. We want them to hold their head up even when they lose knowing that they gave it their best. We want them to value good relationships more than recognition and riches.

But what we say we want for our kids and what we model for them are not always the same thing. We want our kids to be honest, but how much do they hear us bend the truth? We want them to have self-control, but how often do they see us lose our temper? We want them to respect the authorities, but how do they hear us speak about the police, the principal, or the president? We want them to take their Sunday School and Catechism lessons seriously, but how do we reinforce this by our spiritual habits at home? We want them to know how important it is to spend time with family, to go to church, and to help a neighbor in need, but how often are these things set aside for work or for play?

What we say is most important to us is not always or even often supported by what we do. This is why Jesus says, *"the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light."* The sons of this world know what they want. They want money, power, pleasure, and they go out and get it. They work hard for these things. They never take their eyes off their prize.

You and I are among *"the sons of light."* We used to be *"sons of the world,"* but we are not that any longer. Through the powerful Word, the light of faith was kindled in our hearts. The darkness of our sin was dispelled by Jesus' death on the cross. The darkness of death was ended by the bright morning of His resurrection. The light of salvation shines continuously before our eyes in the Gospel, and it changes us. St. Paul writes that *"at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord"* (Eph. 5:8).

Then he says, *"Walk as children of light"* (v. 8). Walking as children of light means always keeping Jesus in focus, always hearing His voice, always following His path, keeping our eyes fixed on the glory to come which He promises to all who trust in Him. Jesus says, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"* (Mat. 6:19-20).

You know that the most important thing in your life is that your soul and body were redeemed from everlasting punishment by the holy blood of Jesus. You know that without His perfect life, without His suffering and death, you would still be dead in your sins. Push comes to shove, if you had to choose between the salvation Jesus won for you and all the riches the world has to offer, I am confident you would choose eternal salvation.

But does your life today match that priority? Is that priority obvious in the way you go about your business? Is that priority obvious in your interactions with friends and co-workers? Is that priority obvious in the way you spend your time and the way you spend your money? When we examine our hearts, we can't deny it; Jesus is right: *"[T]he sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light."*

But *"the sons of light"* are still in the game. You are still here. Satan has not overcome the kingdom of God. The light of Jesus has not been extinguished in the world. The Word of God's grace is still being preached. His Sacraments are still being administered. There are more souls that the Lord intends to call *"out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (1Pe. 2:9).

The Lord has not given up on you. He has not cast you aside. You are still on His team. You still possess the eternal inheritance of all that is His. Jesus died to win you this inheritance. He suffered to free you from the grip of Satan. He shed His blood to cleanse you from your sins. He rose from the dead to win the victory over death once and for all. No matter how many times death matches up against a *"son of light,"* a baptized child of God, death loses every time—every single time.

Do you see what we have to live for? What we are competing for? Because of what Jesus has done, we can't lose. *"The sons of this world"* might appear to be more successful. They might appear to win more. But they are destined to lose. Their luck will run out. The debt collector will come calling. *"The sons of light"* have the victory in Jesus. We might lose out on good things

in this life. We might lose our possessions. We might lose our jobs. We might even lose our lives. But we have Jesus, which means we have immeasurably more than the world could ever offer.

So we apply our wealth and our wisdom to His work. We deny our selfish inclinations. We generously support the work of the Gospel both here and around the world. We seek to serve our neighbors and to share with them the hope we have in Christ. This is how we *“make friends for [ourselves] by means of unrighteous wealth,”* as Jesus calls us to do. We apply all our resources here on earth to guide others in our homes and our communities to the eternal riches of heaven.

We might not see the fruits of our labors with our own eyes, but God promises to bless our faithful work. He uses our weak hands and our small efforts to bring great blessings to those who need them. And when our work here comes to an end, we won't find ourselves in a lonely heaven. We will be welcomed *“into the eternal dwellings”* by many others who, like us, were freed from their sins and from their empty quest for the world's approval.

Then together we will praise our Savior for His great generosity and His abundant mercy. We will praise Him that He was willing to spend all for us sinners – even giving up His own life – so that we would be redeemed from this fallen world and would enter His eternal glory.

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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