

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Luke 16:1-9: “What Do You Have Left to Give?”
August 13/14, 2022 | 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 does not ask for your money or your possessions or your property, but for a humble and generous heart concerned about the needs of your neighbors, dear fellow redeemed:

Just before today’s reading from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son. That son took his inheritance from his father, journeyed to a far country, and “squandered his property in reckless living” (15:13). He wasted everything he had and was left with nothing. Jesus now uses the same word to describe what a rich man’s manager did. Charges were brought that this manager was wasting his employer’s possessions.

How did he waste it? Jesus leaves that part of the story untold, but from what we learn about the manager’s character, it is almost certain that he spent his master’s money on himself. He acted like what belonged to another was his. And now he was going to lose it all. He was just

like the prodigal son, making bad decisions and having a hard time facing the consequences for them.

He didn't want to do manual labor—that would be too hard. He didn't want to have to beg—that would be too shameful. What did he have left? The clock was ticking. The “pink slip” had arrived. The books were due. Then he had an idea. He had fallen out of favor with his rich master. But there were still the debtors he had worked with. This manager was a “middle man.” He enjoyed rubbing elbows with the upper class, but if he could use his connections with the lower class, that was better than nothing.

The manager did not have anything of his own to offer, but he still had his master's books. So he quickly brought in his master's debtors and reduced what they owed. He did them a big favor, so they might do him a favor or two before long. The manager was a scoundrel, but he shrewdly arranged things for his own benefit. What could his master do? Fire him again?

Jesus gave this as an example of how “*the sons of this world*”—the unbelievers—operate. He said, “*the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.*” The “*sons of this world*” are driven by greed, selfishness, and self-preservation. The same should not be said of us “*sons of light*”—believers in Jesus. But that doesn't mean we can't be more shrewd—more wise and responsible—in our stewardship of what He gives us.

Jesus wants us to “*make friends for [ourselves] by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive [us] into the eternal dwellings.*” Now that sounds kind of strange. Why would Jesus want us to “*make friends*” using something “*unrighteous*”? The text literally says, “*by the mammon of unrighteousness.*” Jesus calls it “*unrighteous*,” because money, possessions, and property are for life in this world. They cannot be used to buy favor with God. They cannot pay for your sins or redeem your soul.

Just after today's text, Jesus contrasts “*unrighteous wealth*” with “*true riches*” (v. 11). “*True riches*” are the spiritual gifts of God, such as the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness of faith, salvation and eternal life. Those things can't be bought with money, but that doesn't stop people from trying. When the Gospel was preached in Samaria after Pentecost, a magician named Simon believed and was baptized. He was amazed to see the Holy Spirit being given through the laying on of the apostles' hands. He wanted this power too and offered the apostles money for it. Peter replied, “*May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!*” (Act. 8:20).

Many still think they can obtain God's gifts with money. They are told that if they give money to the church, God will be more pleased with them and their life will get better. The Roman church still sells indulgences and masses for the benefit of both the living and the dead. This wrong thinking can tempt us also. We might become proud because of our generous offerings. We might think that through our large gifts, we are doing more for the Church and for God than others are who give a lot less. Jesus put that idea to rest by praising the poor widow for her offering of two little mites (Luk. 21:1-4).

So why does Jesus connect the spending of “*unrighteous wealth*” with friends receiving us into “*the eternal dwellings*”? How can our earthly stewardship result in the eternal salvation of

ourselves and others? This Divine Service is one example. Because you have called me to be your pastor, and you provide my livelihood, I am able to commit full-time to the preaching and teaching of God's Word and the administration of His Sacraments. The hearing and learning of this Word causes you to grow in faith, and it prepares you to enter eternal life by God's grace.

But you don't give offerings just for yourself. You give so that others can hear the Word too, including people you don't know yet, whom God will bring here in the future. We still benefit today from the gifts given by members who have long since entered into glory. It is good to give with that mentality. We don't just give because of what our offerings can do for us right now. We give cheerfully and generously trusting that God will guide and prosper the use of our offerings for the growth of His kingdom.

The restoration project of the Saude church is a good example of this. A gift in 1948 which grew over time, covered half the cost of the project. That gift was a seed planted, which God caused to grow according to His will. Our gifts to the synod and missions don't always seem to produce big results. But we don't know what God has planned for the future. We may not see the fruits of our labor for a long time, and maybe not until we enter "*the eternal dwellings*." There we will meet friends we never knew existed, who came to faith because God blessed our offerings for His work.

I know I don't need to convince you of the importance of giving. And I expect that each one of you here would like to give more if you could. But things are often tight. We are paying more for food, clothing, gas, and utilities today than we did a year ago. As costs rise, worries increase. "Are there big changes coming for us?" "How much longer can we hang on?" "Will things ever get better?"

Our worries affect our stewardship. It isn't just the effect that worry has on giving, making us hold more tightly to what we have. It's the effect that worry has on our interactions with others. Worry causes us to think more about ourselves just like that manager did. Worry makes us feel desperate. It causes us to neglect the needs of our neighbors. It causes us to forget where our wealth comes from and who is really providing for us.

We might think that we have to protect and store away what little we have. We have nothing left to give. That didn't stop the manager. He had nothing left to give, but his master did. All that we have belongs to our Master. Everything on earth is the Lord's. He created all things and gives the fruits and resources of the earth for us to manage and use. To some He gives more and to others less. But all of it is gift.

By saying that we don't have enough for a neighbor in need, we are really saying that God hasn't given us enough. People often wonder why God doesn't do more to help the hungry and the needy. At the same time, they buy so much food that it expires before they consume it. They forget the new clothes they bought last year and keep buying more. They add another streaming service for their entertainment to the ones they already have. What if God said to us, "Turn in the account of your management—show Me what you have done with My goods!"?

There is no getting around it. We have not been faithful stewards of all that God has given us. Like the worldly manager, we have often acted out of greed, selfishness, and self-preservation.

We have done what is best for ourselves—not for our families, our employers and co-workers, and our neighbors. Our sins are debts, which we cannot recover from or work our way out of on our own.

That's why Jesus taught us to pray to our Father, *"forgive us our trespasses—our debts—as we forgive those who trespass against us"* (Luk. 11:4). Jesus is our Mediator, our "Middle Man." He calls us to Himself, looks at our debt, and says, "Take your bill and write, 'Ransomed. Forgiven. Redeemed.'" Jesus faced the wrath of our Master. He was punished for our wastefulness and selfishness. He balanced the scales and set everything right for us. He paid our debt in full.

When Jesus knelt in the Garden, sweating drops of blood, He didn't say to His Father, "I have nothing left to give." He said, *"not my will, but yours, be done"* (Luk. 22:42). And then He gave up His life for you. He died on the cross, so you would inherit His eternal riches. Jesus held nothing back, and He still holds nothing back. You will never run out of the *"true riches"* that He has obtained for you—His forgiveness, His righteousness, His life—continuously given to you through His Word and Sacraments. And He promises to provide what you need for this earthly life besides.

Despite your mismanagement in the past, He continues to send you out to do His work. He gives to you in abundance, so you can give generously to others. You may not always have large sums of money to offer for the needs of your neighbors. But you can always offer them the saving Word. You can offer your forgiveness and kindness and love. You can offer prayers on their behalf and lend a helping hand.

You are not poor at all, not by any means. You have what is your Master's, and His riches are immeasurable. Until He runs out of gifts to give, you won't either.

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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