

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Luke 16:1-9: “We Leverage the Temporal for the Eternal.”
August 5/6, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, You have bountifully given us Your blessing and our daily bread: We beseech You, preserve us from covetousness, and so enliven our hearts that we willingly share Your blessed gifts with our needy brethren; that we may be found faithful stewards of Your gifts, and abide in Your grace when we shall be removed from our stewardship, and shall come before Your judgment, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 160)

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 is at the right hand of God dispensing all the treasures of His grace to us, dear fellow redeemed:

The manager’s time had run out. The jig was up. He got caught with his hand in the cookie jar. The charges were true, or the manager would not have acted the way he did. He was guilty. Now what to do? If owning the sin and apologizing ever crossed the manager’s mind, Jesus does not tell us. What this man decided was to do what he did best—manipulate things to his own advantage.

Taking on manual labor was out of the question—he didn’t want to do anything too taxing or risk getting blisters on his tender hands. And he was too proud to ask anyone for help—he wouldn’t lower himself so far. So he decided to cheat his master one final time. He quickly

called in others who were indebted to his master, and he reduced the amounts they owed. By unilaterally reducing their debt, he was putting them in debt to him, so that when he was booted out by his master, he would almost certainly find a soft landing somewhere else.

What could the master say? He had been taken *twice*, shame on him. He "*commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.*" But he still fired him. That's how the world works. It's one person trying to get leverage against another. It's: "I'll do you a favor, so you have to do me a favor." "I'll file away this mistake or this transgression and publicize it when the time is right." "I'll step on you if it will boost me up and give me a better position."

This is ugly. It is hurtful. It gets people focused on what they can take from one another instead of what they can give. That is not what we are called to do as Christians. Jesus makes this clear in today's reading. "[M]ake friends for yourselves," He says. And how are we to do this? "[B]y means of unrighteous wealth." What does that mean? It does not mean paying people off to get what you want. It does not mean obligating them to something because of your gifts. What it means is the exact opposite of those things.

"Making friends by means of unrighteous wealth," or earthly wealth, means giving and giving and giving some more. That's what disciples of Jesus are called to do, to give as He gave, love as He loved, help as He helped. Listen to how Jesus describes the love we should have for those around us, even for those who mistreat us. He says, "*I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back*" (Luk. 6:27-30).

That is a truly uncomfortable love! It is a rare love. Most of us would be on the phone with a lawyer before we would let happen what Jesus says we should let happen. But why does He ask this of us? Does He really want us to be everyone's doormat, getting walked all over? He asks this of us, in order to keep our focus on the major thing and not the minor things.

Minor things are the things of this world, temporal things, things that last only for a little while. That includes our money, our possessions, our work, our reputation and honor. All these things are gifts from God, but they are not the major thing. The major thing is what Jesus accomplished for us through His perfect life, death, and resurrection, which He richly and abundantly imparts to us through His Word and Sacraments.

Our reliance on the major thing changes our view of the minor things. We appreciate the good things we have. We use them and enjoy them. But we don't cling to them. We know that everything we have on earth could be gone in an instant. The author to the Hebrews says, "*For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come*" (Heb. 13:14). This puts our involvement in things like politics in their proper place. We are active as citizens, and we exercise our rights, but we keep our hope in God.

This also changes our perspective about possessions. We have what God has given us, nothing more and nothing less. What we have is ours to manage, but not ours to keep. We are stewards of what ultimately belongs to God. In the order of Matins, we sing these words of the inspired

Psalm: *"In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the strength of the hills is His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down"* (95:4-6). Everything is His, including your home, your possessions, and your bank account.

He has given these things to you because He loves you, and He wants you to use them both for your own needs and for the needs of your neighbor. You do this by feeding and clothing yourself and your family. You do this by helping a neighbor who is struggling. You do this by giving offerings here at church, your firstfruits for the work of His kingdom. All of this contributes to "making friends" who *"may receive you into the eternal dwellings."*

If you do not feed and clothe the members of your family, they will despise you. If you ignore the troubles of your neighbors while you prosper, they will hate you. If you fail to support the work of God's Church when you have the means to do so, the pure Gospel will no longer be heard in your community. These sins are even more offensive when committed by those who call themselves followers of Christ—Christians (1Ti. 5:8).

Jesus' indictment in today's reading is that we do not use what we have been given as "shrewdly" as the "sons of this world" do. He calls us *"the sons of light,"* and the sons of light are the ones who let their *"light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven"* (Mat. 5:16). But often our good works are not clearly seen. Instead of using the good gifts of good shrewdly and wisely, we often behave like the selfish sons of this world. We are just as wasteful of the good gifts God has given us. We are just as greedy. We hold what is ours with an iron grip and find it difficult to pry open our hands to give to others.

Not one of us has as much as we want, and yet every one of us has more than we need. We worry about money while our cupboards are full of food, our closets are full of clothes, and we carry around expensive smartphones in our pockets. We have plenty to give, and yet we tell ourselves that there is so much more we need to receive before we can give.

God would have every right to call in the bill for all the services He has provided us and all the goods He has given. He could rightly say, *"What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager."* We deserve to be booted out of His house, banished from His kingdom, and lose all that He has given.

But the Lord's Manager, His only Son, calls us to His side. *"How much do you owe My Master?"* He asks. But instead of fudging the numbers or sweeping our debt under the rug, He accepts it as His own. *"I will pay your penalty,"* He says. *"I will satisfy your debt. I will atone for your transgressions."* He went to the cross to do just that, shedding His holy blood and dying to take away all your sins. He made the payment for your lack of generosity, for your coldness toward others, for your self-centered thinking about what will be best for you.

Through His Word and Sacraments which you are privileged to receive each week, Jesus comes to you, and He says, *"Take the bill of this week's debts, all the sins you committed against your heavenly Father in your thoughts, words, and actions, and write this: Paid. Forgiven. Dismissed."* That's what Jesus does for you. He cancels the debt that you keep accruing. He

distributes His gifts to you in abundance and doesn't worry about getting a fair return. He just gives.

Through these rich gifts, the Holy Spirit puts the same loving purpose in you. He turns your focus away from yourself and toward others. The Holy Spirit teaches us to **Leverage the Temporal for the Eternal**, to "make *Christian* friends for ourselves" by sacrificial love and by supporting the preaching of the Gospel here in our congregation and through the mission and work of our synod. We are listening to God's Word here today, because others have done this giving before us. We are the friends they have made "*by means of unrighteous wealth*," by means of their sacrificial gifts and offerings.

We want to do the same for others. We know that everything we have needed in our lives has been richly supplied by our merciful Lord, starting with our salvation through His Son. When His Word is our most precious Treasure, everything else falls into place. Jesus assures us, "*Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys*" (Luk. 12:32-33).

By the grace of God, our treasure in heaven is secure. And we look forward to the day when our good friends, the faithful saints who have gone before us, will joyfully welcome us to God's "*eternal dwellings*," where we will sing His praises forever.

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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