

Ninth Sunday After Trinity, A✠D, 2008

Luke 16:1-13 He 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. ² 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.' ³ 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. ⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' ⁵ So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ 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.' ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Many new calendars have reoriented the week to begin on Monday, probably because that's the first day of work. But any first-grader can tell you that's foolish. Sunday is the first day of the week. And the first hours of the first day of the week, the freshest, newest, best part of the week, we spend in church. Why? Because it's the best part of the week. The whole week belongs to the Lord, but He uses the firstfruits of the week to shower His grace upon us as He gathers us in His service. But this is not a sermon about church attendance. At the start of each meal, before the first bite is taken, while the smell of piping-hot, hopefully-delicious food fills our noses, while our stomachs rumble with hunger, we don't begin the meal with fork in hand. We begin with hands folded and head bowed. The firstfruits of the mealtime belong to the Lord, as well. He is the giver of all good gifts, food included, so we give Him thanks before we eat. But this not a sermon about meals or prayer.

2 This is a sermon about money. And this is the part of the sermon where lovers of money, those, according to Jesus who love money and hate God, either get angry and stop listening, or listen attentively hoping to feel self-righteous. The firstfruits belong to the Lord. Not just the firstfruits, but the last fruits, as well. But He only asks for the first portion. In the Old Testament, the first tenth of the harvest, the first tenth of profits were brought to the temple. That's why it's called the firstfruits. So, after receiving a paycheck, the first check God wants you to write, the first payment you are to make, is to Him.

3 There's no set amount God wants you to give. The Israelites were required to give a tenth, some of which went to the temple, some of which went to take care of the poor and widows. And when they didn't give a full tenth, the Lord said they were robbing Him (Mal. 3:8). But for the new Israelites, those grafted into God's chosen people by faith in Jesus, there is no recommended percentage. You may give ten percent, thirty percent, five percent, of your income. It doesn't matter. What matters is that you give a regular percent of your income—not a regular amount, a regular percentage. What matters is that you give sacrificially. Jesus praised the widow who gave two fractions of a coin but criticized the rich who gave far more than she had even ever imagined. What matters is that you give such that you could not afford all the luxuries you might otherwise have purchased. And what matters is that you give regularly. The offering part of your budget is untouchable; you may not borrow from it to pay off debts.

4 Don't misunderstand. God doesn't need your money. Don't be that proud. No, God wants you to give, not for His sake, but for yours. Giving an offering is a spiritual exercise. God wants you to recognize that everything you have is a gift from Him. And He wants you to trust that He gives you enough. And God blesses you when you give. No, He probably doesn't give you more money, like false preachers tell you. In fact, being faithful in your giving might make finances even more tight. But He does bless you. From your offerings, God continues the work of His Church, to preach the Gospel, to declare sins forgiven, to baptize in His holy Name, and to deliver the forgiveness of sins in the Body and Blood of Jesus.

5 If talking about money makes you squirm, it's because you know you're not giving like God calls you to. Beware. You cannot serve both God and money. You cannot love both your Lord and your wallet. So repent. If talking about giving makes you sit up straighter so people will notice you as a faithful giver, repent. You cannot love yourself and your Lord, either. And if talk about money elicits no reaction, repent. If you are not faithful in unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you true riches? Jesus isn't preaching about *your* money. Nothing you have is really yours, after all. As you'll sing in a moment, "We give Thee but Thine own, whate'er the gift may be. All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee." If the Lord hadn't allowed you to receive it, no amount of hard work on your part would have gotten it.

6 The sons of the world are better at managing their treasures than sons of light are at managing theirs. If the greatest treasure you have is your money, your possessions, or your desire for more possessions, then

you should guard these with your life. But if your treasure is different from these, far greater than money or possessions, you should repent of guarding these with your life.

7 There was a Rich Man who had a Manager. And the Rich Man demanded from the Manager the account of His management. More than that, the Rich Man demanded from the Manager His life. The debtors of the Rich Man had accumulated debt far beyond their ability to pay. The Rich Man was just and fair. While He did not want to punish the debtors for their debts, He knew they had to be paid. And the only One who could afford to pay for the debt of the world's sinfulness was the Manager whom the Rich Man, the Heavenly Father, sent. So the Manager, Jesus Christ, took the debts from all the debtors, took the sins from all the sinners, and paid them Himself by His death on the cross.

8 And the Manager summons the Master's debtors, one by one. How much do you owe the Master? The debtor replies, "My sinfulness costs me my life and earns me eternal damnation." So the Manager answers, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write zero." For the sake of Jesus Christ, the Sinless Son of God, whom God the Father sent to pay for the world's sinfulness, your debt has been cancelled. The debt you could never pay, the debt that by working toward paying it off you only got deeper in dept, He paid.

9 This is your treasure. The Manager paid your debts; the Judge suffered your punishment. So you, sons and daughters of light, have been given a treasure beyond earthly comparison. You think the money you used to guard zealously is valuable? It is nothing compared with the eternal treasure which is now yours. You have the forgiveness of sins. You have life eternal. You have salvation. And as proof that these gifts are yours, you have a feast today. You dine on the body and Blood of Him who died to pay for your sins. These treasures put unrighteous wealth to righteous use. So you pray, "May we Thy bounties thus as stewards true receive and gladly, as Thou blessest us, to Thee our firstfruits give!"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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