

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Luke 16:1-9[10-13] 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. "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 Did the disciples groan when Jesus began another money sermon? When they discovered the point of the parable was to call them to be better stewards of the unrighteous wealth entrusted to their care, did they lose interest, tighten the purse strings, duck out early, and find a better way to spend their Sabbaths? This time, however, Jesus isn't preaching on tithing, on what you put—or refuse to put—into the offering plate. Stewardship is about more than tithing. Once you've given your firstfruits to God, you're simply not free to do whatever you wish with what remains. Even with unrighteous wealth, you are called to be faithful and generous.

2 A parable: A rich man had a steward, a wicked steward, guilty of wasting the rich man's possessions. When summoned to the rich man's office to give an accounting of

his wasteful management, the steward knew he'd be fired. How would he maintain his luxurious standard of living? All this comfy managing in a high-backed office chair had left him too weak and atrophied to dig, to do any real blue-collar labor. His lofty living made him too proud to beg for handouts from strangers. In a desperate act, he summoned the rich man's debtors to him one by one. "How much do you owe my master? A hundred measures of oil? Take your bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty." "How much do you owe my master? A hundred measures of wheat? Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write eighty." Since he was going to be fired anyway, why not make some friends on the way out the door? Why not use the rich man's wealth to secure his future? Then, when the rich man heard about the steward's final act of stewardship, he commended him for his shrewdness.

3 It makes no sense that the rich man would commend the steward for giving away the rich man's possessions, for capriciously reducing the legitimate debts of the master's debtors. That is, of course, unless that's what the steward was to have been doing all along. "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." "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

4 It's easy to be generous with someone else's money. It's a matter of believing what you confess in the First Article of the Creed: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care for them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all I need to support this body and life." It's

a matter of believing what you pray in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." You are only a steward. No possession, no cent, nothing you have endures as yours on the day of your death. What God has entrusted to your care for the time being, He has called you to manage faithfully, using unrighteous wealth to make friends to welcome you into eternal dwellings. As God has provided you with daily bread, so you are His instruments for providing daily bread—everything to support this body and life—to those around you who are in need. You will be called to give an account for your miserly management and selfish stewardship. Repent.

5 Another parable Jesus could've told: "a certain policeman came home from work and found a thief robbing his house. The policeman's wife and children were tied up, but the thief was caught by surprise and unarmed. The policeman restrained the thief and freed his wife and children. Then he made out his will. He gave all his goods, his house, his car, his pension, and his savings, to the thief. Then he told the wife and children to love the thief as they had loved him. He gave them to the thief as his inheritance. Then he freed the thief and handed him the gun. When the thief put the gun to the policeman's head, the policeman said, 'This is good. Now you can have what you want. I give you what you sought to steal. You get what you want and that pleases me.' The

thief killed the policeman and moved into his house and they lived happily ever after.”

(Pr. Peterson)

6 Rich men who want to stay rich don't reward stewards for giving away their wealth. Policemen don't succeed at serving and protecting by handing over all their possessions to a thief and then giving their lives so the thieves can prosper. Shepherds don't go looking for a single sheep, and they certainly don't give up their lives for the sheep. Sowers don't wantonly scatter seed. Samaritans don't pay for the care of Jews. The point of the parables is to shock, to surprise, to leave you saying, "That could never happen." The Gospel is so contrary to our way of thinking that Jesus told these outrageous parables to prepare His hearers for it.

7 Another parable: There was another Rich Man who had a Manager. The Rich Man demanded from the Manager the account of His management. More than that, the Rich Man demanded from the Manager His very 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; I justly deserved your temporal and eternal punishment." So the Manager answers, Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write zero. I forgive you." 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

only grew bigger, He paid. That's the preposterous, outrageous, impossible-to-comprehend Gospel. "That could never happen!" But it has.

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 your unrighteous wealth to righteous use.

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

Soli Deo Gloria
Pastor Jeff Hemmer
Hope, Jerseyville