

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 22, 2013
18th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Amos 8:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-8
Hymns: 14; 439; 400; 453:1,2 (798:1,3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 16:1-13

He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

3 "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'

5 "So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So 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?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous

mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: "It's hard to find god help these days!"

That expression is heard time and again. It's repeated in TV programs and movies, but its sounds real because it is really what so many people experience time and again. Some people expect to work on their own terms, showing up when they want and taking off when they want. Some have no respect for the employer's business, or equipment. Some just don't want to put out the kind of effort the job requires. And when the business owner finds that he needs a good manager, he may find himself picking from a very questionable lot of applicants with very sketchy backgrounds. What's one to do? Do it all by oneself? For people that is often impossible.

Of course that wouldn't be the case with God. With God all things are possible. The Lord is fully capable of conducting the business of His kingdom without any of our help. He could deliver the message of the gospel in a number of different ways without involving a bunch of flunkies like us. But that is not what God has chosen to do. God has chosen to grant us the privilege of being involved in His business, of managing His blessings for the advancement His Kingdom of Grace. With such grace being bestowed upon us surely it will be our desire to be --

THEME: Good Managers of God's Earthly Gifts.

This is the first lesson of this parable of our Lord: that we recognize --

I. Our Stewardship.

First we need to comprehend that we are indeed stewards. We are not owners, we are servants. We are not independent entrepreneurs, we are in the Lord's service. Maybe this is a little more foreign to us than to people living in other cultures or at other times. If we watch one of the TV popular drama about British high society of the early twentieth century. Ordinary people knew their place. They knew that all the fine things that surrounded them every day were not theirs, but belonged to the Lord of the manor. The lord and ladies of the manor also knew their place. Do we see ourselves as the lord of the manor, or do we know our place, that we are the ones who are privileged to be "in service?" I think it is our good old American pride that objects to the notion of being "in service" to anyone.

Pride can be such an obstacle to understanding the wonder and the privilege that is ours that we know our Lord and God as our good and gracious Father. It is a privilege to be included in His service. He has trusted us with many earthly treasures. He has given to each of us varied responsibilities to manage with the gifts he has given us.

In the parable of the wicked manager Jesus presents a manager who wastes his master's goods instead of caring for his master's interests. He is called to an accounting. This portion of the parable serves us as a reminder that we all shall also give an accounting of our stewardship of the Master's goods. We have a tendency to think of all the material things that surround us in life as our personal possessions, to do with as we wish. We forget that all things come to us from God, and in fact belong to God. We do well to remember the words of the Lord from the Prophet Haggai:

Haggai 2:8 "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says the Lord of hosts."

And so we also sing of this truth in one of our hymns:

TLH 438:2 "The wealth of earth, of sky, of sea The gold, the silver, sparkling gem, the waving corn, the bending tree, Are Thine; to us Thou lendest them."

So we are led to acknowledge that all that we have has come to us from God, and indeed all things are His. We are merely His stewards who are to use these earthly gifts that have come into our possession according to His will, and to His glory.

The point of the parable is not however a warning that we shall be caught if we are wasteful stewards. It is to teach us a lesson concerning --

II. The Shrewd Use of God's Gifts.

This is where we get into the heart of this parable. The unjust steward knows that his time as steward is about to end. The master has heard of his shenanigans, and the manager has been informed that he will certainly lose his position. He looks immediately to the future. What will he do? How can he make his way in the world? He isn't about to dig ditches, he doesn't have any desire to do any hard manual labor. He is too proud to beg. He resolves to use the power of the stewardship while it is still in his control to provide for the future. He continues his unjust behavior. He continues to waste his master resources and diminish his master's assets, but he gains friends. Acting as his master's agent, he has the people who owe his master reduce their debt, dramatically reduce their debt. Then later they will welcome him into their homes as their friend and benefactor! What the steward does in this parable is despicable! However it is also very shrewd!

It is this shrewd use of his master's wealth that is the point of Jesus' parable. It is all about making friends that will give you such a warm welcome. At the same time we need to remember the spiritual perspective which the Lord brings to our lives instead of the material to which we are so easily attached. When Jesus commends the shrewdness of the unjust steward He is not at the same time commending his wickedness. It is the wise use of the goods in his temporary control that Jesus is pointing to. The unjust steward realized that this wealth was only in his control for a short time. He wasn't going to have it forever, and he seized the opportunity that lay before him to do what he could with those goods while they were in his control. He did a bad thing when he had others reduce their debt, but they were grateful. They

benefitted greatly from his actions. Their friendship would serve him well when he was in need.

So we also should recognize that all that the Lord has entrusted to us is in our control for only a short time. Even if we live into our 90's or to be centenarians it won't change the fact that what the Lord has entrusted to us now will not go with us when we die. Solomon found this to be one of the vanities of life under the sun. The facts haven't changed since the days of Solomon. What we do with the material treasures we have now is going to be determined by our attitude toward them. Are they given to us so that we might hoard them? Are they given to us that we might waste them on our own extravagant comforts and pleasures? Or is the Lord here advising us that we should use the resources He has entrusted to us to gain friends, not for this life but for another life, that life which is to come. That can be done by using them wisely, reserving a portion for the Lord's service. Then we will find –

III. A Warm Welcome at the End of Service.

Even as Jesus directs attention to how this man looked to the future and used what was entrusted to him to gain friends for that future, so we should look to the future and use what Jesus has entrusted to us to prepare for a reception by dear friends in that future, but Jesus points farther ahead to a greater future. It isn't about getting something back here and now. Jesus taught the opposite of that idea. Just a couple of weeks ago we read these words of our Lord recorded in Luke's gospel.

Luke 14:12-14 Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

We should use those treasures entrusted to us to win friends that will receive us in heaven. How can we do that but by the promotion of the gospel of Christ? In our text Jesus made a distinction between the lesser treasures and the greater treasures.

He wanted us to understand that all the money and property that we may accumulate in this life is but the “lesser treasure” put in our stewardship. The “greater treasure” is of course the treasure of the gospel itself. The Lord has entrusted us to be managers of the gospel in His kingdom. He would have us use our resources, our strength, our wisdom to share that most precious of all blessings with others in the world.

We know of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. We know that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. In our epistle lesson this morning we read of how “**God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**” We are so blessed that we have been called to faith by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit so that we know of the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. The Lord has given us this treasure of the assurance of forgiveness and peace in His name. We hold this treasure in our hearts. Now let us use both our material and spiritual treasures to make friends, Christian friends, eternal friends. Let us use our treasures wisely, shrewdly to their best advantage to make the most friends possible during this short time that we have in this life. Let us do the most good for others while we can.

This is the Lord’s lesson for us in this parable. Let us take it to heart, then when these treasures fail, we will find a line of friends ready to welcome us into the eternal mansion of the Father’s heavenly kingdom.

The appreciation of the gospel among others isn’t always apparent to us now and perhaps that leads us to be a bit discouraged in our task of stewardship. Let us not be so discouraged. There are many others who have written to us expressing their appreciation for the gospel we have shared with them. We read of these friends in Christ in our mission newsletters. There is a new one on the table right outside the narthex. Pick one up as you leave this morning. Learn of these friends. These expressions are not empty expressions but heartfelt expressions of love and appreciation. Let us be encouraged by that and recognize that these are the friends that we shall find waiting for us to welcome us as we enter into heaven.

Conclusion: Jesus concluded that We Cannot Serve God and Mammon.

Jesus' lesson was all about service, and how we serve the Lord while we live here in this material, and materialistic world. Being good managers, in service to the Lord has its requirements. Service involves love and devotion, trust, and an obedience that flows from that trust. Who is our master? Is it God, or the riches of this world? In this world it is easy, oh so very easy, to be taken in by the deceitfulness of riches. If we truly believe that our security for time and eternity is found in gold, the accumulation of wealth, then Mammon, or earthly wealth, is our master. It is the one we trust, the one we love above all else, the one we serve with our time and devotion. However, if it is Christ who is our security both here in time and hereafter in eternity than the money the Lord has entrusted to us is nothing more than a means to an end, it is a tool that we use in or service to the Lord. Our devotion belongs to the Lord. We will live out our days serving Him with our time, our talents, and our wealth. This is the service of estate management which the Lord has entrusted to us. We are to advance His goals and His purpose, His kingdom of grace here on earth, and we are to live to the praise of His glory. Then later we shall live there in that glory that awaits us, there with all the saints, including the friends we have in Christ here, now. Praise His glorious name!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.