

THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Luke 16:1-9

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I am sure that none of us here this morning have what the world considers great riches. Still, if you were rich, if your name appeared at the top of the list of the world's most wealthy men or women, if you owned acre upon acre of land, if you owned mansions, or lived in palaces, if you could purchase small islands and make them your own personal kingdom, if you were king or queen of the world, you would still be merely a steward managing goods and treasure that belong not to you, but God.

Not only are you merely a steward, but on the day your grieving family and friends lay your earthly remains to rest, you will take no more with you than the poorest among us—absolutely nothing! For we are all both stewards and beggars, lords and tenants, made rich with borrowed goods not our own, but accorded to each of us as God sees fit, and as it pleases Him. Everything we possess, indeed, everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily supplied and sustained by the generosity and graciousness of our God, to whom everything truly belongs.

Knowing this, one might ask: *“Why is it that we cling so tightly to what does not belong to us? Why do we cling to this world and all its pleasures? Why do we prefer the temporal over the eternal? Just what is it about the treasures of this world that we find so much more attractive than the treasures of heaven?”*

Well, the answer to each of these questions is really very simple. We do not always believe in our hearts what we confess with our mouths. We are those of weak or little faith. Our desires rest on the now with little or no thought at all for the not yet. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush you might say.

Therefore, instant gratification has become our doctrine to the point of dogma, and we live in the moment as though there is nothing else for which one might live. Far too often, we live as though this present life is all there is, that we must grab for the gusto while we can because we only get one shot at life. Our creed is *“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!”*

So, we sow, we reap, and we gather into barns. We toil and spin. We fear for tomorrow. We fear for tomorrow because we do not believe in the promises of God for

today. We are poor stewards of God's treasure, unfaithful in unrighteous mammon. We treat God's gifts as though they are ours and ours alone.

Yet, the gifts of God are not given to you strictly for your benefit, but also that of your neighbor. We receive from God that which is not ours. When we receive beyond our daily needs we are called upon to share with our neighbor that which he or she needs. In fact, nothing we possess is truly ours but is God's alone, a gift given to those who do not deserve even the least of these, to be used in love and service to God through love and service to our neighbor. It is this service alone that pleases God, and it is for this very purpose that the gifts supplied by God are to be used.

Therefore, when you have more than you need and selfishly neglect or refuse to use it in service to God and the Church in love for your neighbor, you are trampling on the grace of God, making of His gifts nothing more than stolen goods used in selfish ways for things neither given you by God nor needed to sustain you in this temporal life. So, it is, that we are to store up treasure in heaven by giving away in service to our neighbor what is not our own in the first place, but God's.

Oh, that we would endeavor to ensure our eternity even as the steward of CHRIST's parable endeavored to ensure his transitory, fast-fleeting, temporal life. If only we were concerned about our eternal life to the same degree the unrighteous steward cared for his temporal life of comfort. If only we were concerned about our righteousness to the same degree as we are concerned for our comfort and personal benefit. If an unrighteous man should strive mightily to guarantee for himself things temporal, how much more should a righteous man strive for things eternal?

Do you not see how much harder the wicked and unrighteous of this world work only to receive, in the end, eternal damnation for their efforts? Do not imitate them! Your Lord's yoke is easy and His burden is light. He has already accomplished all that is necessary so that the righteous may receive their heavenly reward.

Thus, one must realize that in this world nothing is really ours, but what we have has been temporarily entrusted to us as stewards of the goods of our LORD God. Either we use them in thanksgiving according to our needs, or we distribute them to our neighbor according to his needs. It is nothing more than ungratefulness and sin to misuse or abuse the grace and goods that have been committed to us by the LORD God, or to claim the right to extravagant expense and display, as all the while we ignore the needs of so many around us. For this, we must, and will, give an account to the LORD when He comes.

What excuse then, will we have if we are negligent and fail to gain a harvest a hundredfold in place of what little we have? What excuse will we have if we are

negligent and fail to gain the future in place of the present? What excuse will we have if we are negligent and fail to gain the eternal in place of the temporary?

So, it is, that we are to be wise as serpents but innocent as doves. We are to be shrewd as the world is shrewd, but certainly not for the same reason. As children of God, we should pursue our eternal welfare with the same zeal and with the same shrewdness and tenacity as the children of the world strive after temporal pleasures and possessions; not for the sake of selfish gain, but for the sake of our eternal souls.

But beware! I am not saying that good works make one good or acceptable to God or in any way merit entrance into heaven, nor is our LORD JESUS. Good works will not purchase a seat for you at the Great Eternal Feast of our LORD. Good works do not make one good, but only show evidence of faith which alone makes one good in the eyes of God. The good that one does in this life simply attests to the faith that exists in one's heart.

Therefore, one must first be good before one can do good. One must first be godly before one can act in a godly way, and this godliness comes only by grace through God-given faith in JESUS, God's SON. To quote Martin Luther: *"Therefore, faith alone must be present first to make us good, after that good works must follow to prove our piety,"* (Martin Luther: 9th Sunday after Trinity, 1522).

So, work now while it is still day. The time is coming when it will be night when no one can work. As the unjust steward was ensuring himself for a life that was going to end, should you not also strive to ensure yourself for eternal life? Oh Christian, buy for yourselves those things that do not pass away, by means of those temporary things that are not yours!

Trust in your Master who gave all that He had to save you, even His own life upon a cross. Your bill is stamped *"Paid in full,"* for your debt has been paid, washed away in the waters of Holy Baptism stained red by the Blood JESUS shed on the Cross.

You see, in the Garden of Eden, through what was not his, Adam purchased for himself and all mankind what was not his: pain, sickness, suffering, and death. But now, through what was not yours to spend, that is, the very life-giving Body and Blood of JESUS, you receive what could never have been yours through work or merit of your own—CHRIST'S righteousness, CHRIST'S life, CHRIST'S holiness. Through what JESUS gives away you have gained eternal life having been made sons and daughters of God.

It is true, we have squandered our heavenly FATHER'S possessions in selfishness and sin, but JESUS, who is the Steward of Righteousness, has canceled our debt, knowing

that His forgiveness will be honored by His FATHER because of His obedience to His FATHER's will and His holy suffering and death upon the Cross.

JESUS made eternal friends of us, not by hoarding things for Himself, but by living as one with no home of His own, having no place to lay His head. He became poor so that we may know and receive the riches of His mercy. He even gave away His own Body into death, so that through His atoning and all-sufficient sacrifice we may be cleansed from all unrighteousness. JESUS relied on the Mercy of His FATHER. He trusted that the FATHER would honor His death in our place, His Blood covering the debt we owed.

So, come forward now and receive from the hands of this steward that very same Blood, for it is my privilege to announce unto you the grace of God and to place into your mouth that with which your debt of sin is paid and your account closed.

Friends, because our LORD JESUS died on the Cross, your account reads "*paid in full.*" Therefore, you will receive an everlasting home. How do you know? You know because you hear and believe our LORD JESUS when He says, "*I forgive you all your sins.*"

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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