

**THE NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

Text: St. Luke 16:1-13

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

Have you ever wondered, “*What is the meaning of life?*” or “*Why am I here?*” That, it seems, is the question of the ages. Yet, through the ages, man has looked in all the wrong places for an answer to this fundamental question. Sinful man feels the need to define himself and his existence according to what brings him pleasure, and so he looks within himself, trusting in his emotions and his experience rather than the Word of the One True God. But that God, JESUS CHRIST, tells us this morning that we are to hear the Word of God and keep it—and in the hearing and keeping of it, we shall not only preserve our life, but also find its true meaning.

So why are we here? It is simple really. We are here to love and serve God. But then, how is that done? Indeed, how does one serve God who already has everything and is in need of nothing? In fact, we Lutherans confess that God, the FATHER, is the provider of all things, that He daily and richly provides us with all we need for this body and life. It is as the psalmist writes: “*The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.*” Thus, everything we possess, indeed, everything in heaven and on earth besides, is daily given and sustained by our gracious God. So, what do we poor sinful creatures have to offer Him? How do we love and serve the Most High God?

We love and serve God by loving and serving our neighbor—nothing more and nothing less. We receive from God and give to our neighbor. It truly *is* that simple. We give to our neighbor what is not our own, but that which belongs to our Master. For 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 service to God through love and service to our neighbor. It is this service alone, which pleases God. And it is for this purpose that unrighteous mammon is to be used.

Mammon, or money, or anything we might consider treasure, is in itself neither evil nor unrighteous. It, too, is a gift from God. But mammon becomes unrighteous when you have more than you need and you use it selfishly in love of and service to self, neither heeding nor caring for the needs of those around you, especially fellow Christians.

Thus, when you have more than you need and refuse to use it in service to God in love for your neighbor, it becomes unrighteous mammon given to greed and gluttony, instead of to love. Such mammon is, before God, 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, indeed, not our own in the first place, but God’s.

But then, that *is* the problem, is it not; even for us Christians? Though placed in the Kingdom of God, we remain surrounded by the kingdom of the world; and our souls, laboring under Adam's wretched legacy of sin, waver continually to and fro, like grass blowing in the wind, between two allegiances. Two lords. Two masters. One God, and the other mammon. But, *"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."*

You may be tempted to believe that you are better than that, stronger than that; that indeed, you can pursue the treasures and comforts of this life without jeopardizing your eternal soul. Repent! The pursuits and pleasures of this world are at odds with your faith and your confession.

It is impossible to be a slave to two masters who have contrary wills and two different minds which are completely irreconcilable. This world and the world to come are at odds with one another, and one cannot serve the world and do the will of CHRIST. You will either *"hate the one and love the other, or else [you] will be loyal to the one and despise the other."*

This world and the world to come are enemies. We cannot be friends of both. We are either with CHRIST JESUS or against Him. JESUS is either our LORD and SAVIOR, and Friend, or He is our enemy. Life with this world in this present vale of tears means adultery, corruption, greed, gluttony, deceit, and every kind of evil, while life with CHRIST, now, and in the world to come, means giving these things up and turning our faces toward the Cross of JESUS, our LORD.

Thus, one must realize that in this world nothing is really ours, but what we have has been 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 need. 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 while ignoring the needs of so many around us.

For such abuse, we must and will give an account to the LORD when He comes. What excuse will we have if we are negligent and fail to gain a harvest a hundredfold in place of the little we have? What excuse will we have if we are negligent and fail to gain the future in place of the present? And what excuse will we have if we are negligent and fail to gain the eternal in place of what is only transient and 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 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 works make one good or acceptable to God, or merit entrance into heaven, nor is our LORD JESUS. Works do not make one good, but only show

evidence of the *faith* which makes one good in the eyes of God. The good that one does in this life attests to the faith 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. The sainted Father Martin Luther once preached, *"Therefore, faith alone must be present first to make us good, after that good works must follow to prove our piety."* (Luther: 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, 1522)

Thus, our LORD warns us to work now while it is still day. For the time is coming when it will be night when no man can work. As the unjust steward was insuring himself for a life that was going to end, should you not also strive to insure 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. Take your bill and write *"Paid in full,"* for your debt has been washed away in the waters of Holy Baptism stained red by the Blood CHRIST shed on that same Cross. You see, it was through what was not his that Adam purchased for himself and all mankind what was not his: pain, sickness, suffering, and death. Now through what was not ours to spend, that is, the very life of JESUS, we receive what was not ours but CHRIST's: CHRIST's righteousness, CHRIST's life, CHRIST's holiness. Through what JESUS gives away we have gained eternal life having been made children 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 cancelled our debt, knowing that His forgiveness will be honored by the FATHER because of 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 might know and receive the riches of His mercy. He even gave away His own Body into death, that through His atoning and all-sufficient sacrifice we are cleansed from all unrighteousness. JESUS relied on the mercy of His FATHER. He trusted that the FATHER would honor His death in our place to cover the debt we owed.

So come forward now and receive from the hands of this steward the marks of your balance sheet. By receiving the Body and Blood of our LORD know that your debt of sin has been paid, your account closed. It is my privilege to announce unto you the grace of God and to place into your mouth that which declares your debt of sin paid in full.

Your books are balanced. Your account reads zero. You will receive an everlasting home. How do you know? You know because you hear and believe JESUS when He says to you, *"I forgive you all your sins."*

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

✠ ✠ ✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠ ✠ ✠

Rev. Raymond D. Parent II  
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Crestview, Florida  
7/28/24 A&D