

**P:** We bow our hearts in prayers: Dear Father in heaven, You *certainly give us our daily bread without our prayer; even to all the wicked; but we pray...that You would lead us to acknowledge this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving* and serve You faithfully with it, even as You serve us faithfully through Your Word and Sacraments. (Luther's S.C.: Explanation to the 4th petition)

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus] 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. 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.' ...

"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...." (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When dealing with the loss of his children and worldly wealth, St. Job said very succinctly,

**"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there.**

**The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord."**

Everything that we are and have has come from the Lord.

Dr. Luther summarized many of these gifts well in his Explanation to the 1<sup>st</sup> Article:

*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...*

*that He richly and daily provides me with food and clothing, home and family, property and goods,*

*and all that I need to support this body and life...*

In addition, when considering the 4<sup>th</sup> Petition of the Lord's Prayer he says,

*Daily bread includes everything needed for this life; such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, cattle, money, goods,*

*God-fearing spouse and children, faithful servants and rulers, good government, good weather; peace, health, order, honor; true friends, good neighbors, and the like.*

Considering all these blessings that God has given us can be daunting,

because it also means that He has given all these things to us for us to use as His possessions.

Far from the world's concept of possession as "Mine, mine, mine,"

the Christian recognizes everything is a trust and gift from God, it's "His, His, His."

Like the steward in our text, God requires an accounting of us, and Jesus tells us,

**For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required;**

**and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.** (Luke 12:48)

Realize then that this stewardship goes far beyond just the money we put into the offering plate.

If He has given you your *body and soul*, how is your stewardship of them?

He gave you your *reason and all your senses*.

Have you been using them totally in His service? Or more for your own?

He gives you *everything needed for this life: food, clothing, property, and goods*.

How much return has He been getting on His investment in you?

Consider also how you have managed (or mismanaged)

His gifts of *peace, health, good government and good weather*?

Can you boast of your service to Him in these often overlooked areas?

But He has given you something even more precious,

responsibilities for the well-being of bodies and souls: your *family, true friends, and good neighbors*.

And with the installation of two teachers for our elementary school in a few weeks,

we can especially highlight the responsibilities, not just that the teachers have

but also we as a congregation have for our young neighbors and their parents and families.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> Chief part of the Catechism regarding Confession,

we read how we might examine ourselves to recognize our sins,

especially those in the area of our stewardship or management of God's goods:

*Here consider your own situation according to the Ten Commandments,*

*whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter; employer; employee;*

*whether you have been disobedient, dishonest, lazy;*

*whether you have injured anyone by word or deed;*

*whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted anything or done any harm.*

Notice however, that nothing is really mentioned that is explicitly part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Table of the Law, regarding our relationship with God.

That's because while we might think we are doing well by God,

how we treat our neighbor is part of a reflection and demonstration of our treatment of God

as well as our stewardship of His blessings.

St. John applies this thought:

**But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need,**

**and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?** (1 John 3:17)

*Here consider your own situation according to the 1<sup>st</sup> Table of the Law:*

Do you serve the one true God alone, or have the blessings He's given you for stewardship

become the thing you serve by your priorities, attention and dedication?

Are you shrewd in using your status as a baptized child of God, living under His holy name,

to see ways to serve Him, your Father, with whatever blessings He has given you?

Or do you squander and waste His craftiness and righteous mammon unrighteously

or for purely personal gain without any thought of Him?

But even this examination scratches only the surface.

Don't let all this focus on your service (or lack thereof) distract you,

because there is a service even more important.

So focused are we at times on serving ourselves... or our neighbor... or even God,

that we can easily neglect the importance of being served by God.

By way of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment God teaches us the importance of His Divine service to us,  
on hearing His Word and receiving His Sacraments.

Here we see that it is not just the activity of being in His presence,  
that is, having a seat in the pew or a spot at the communion rail,  
but it is in *hearing, reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting them*,  
so that the Holy Spirit can *comfort your heart by His holy absolution*,  
*and strengthen you by His Sacraments*;

it is to be hungering for Communion with Him so that you may be satisfied, nourished,  
and strengthened for the service He calls you to do.

But my dear Fellow Redeemed, if we are not faithful stewards of His Means of Grace,  
how can you expect to be faithful stewards of the **unrighteous mammon**  
He has given you to administer?

If you are not faithful stewards of His Word and Sacraments,  
then you are not good stewards of your *body and soul*.

If you neglect or ignore or think little of the ways by which He freely gives you forgiveness,  
spiritual strength, and eternal blessings, then you prove to be a wasteful steward, not fit for duty.

But if you will listen to the Master, you will hear of the greatest Steward ever, His Son, Jesus Christ.  
You will hear how the Son of God was also given a body and soul, flesh and blood, just like you,  
to serve the heavenly Father with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength,  
with all His mind.

And how He did it faithfully, diligently, and shrewdly, never neglecting the gift of His Word,  
never taking His stewardship for granted nor using it for personal gain;

You will hear how He unselfishly served His neighbors by giving of Himself in love to them  
with all that He had been given,

You will hear how He served both God and you, sacrificing His most precious possession,  
His body and soul, on the cross to pay back the debts of your wasteful stewardship.

You will hear how **you are not your own, but were bought at a price.** (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

You will hear how Jesus' resurrection makes you a new creation,  
so that you no longer have to labor or beg or barter with God.

For you are no longer in God's debt, for it has been paid in full with the blood of Jesus Christ,  
His Son.

Instead you have been restored back to your stewardship.

In fact, through your Baptism, still a most precious gift,  
by which you are **buried** and by which you **rise with Christ**,  
He has made you **children of God** and **co-heirs with Christ.** (Rom. 8:17)

You have a seat at His table to commune with Him,  
receiving the most precious substance in this creation,  
the crucified and risen body and blood of the Son of God.

All the gold, silver, or precious gems in the world cannot buy for you what these gifts give to you.

He now gives them to you freely, without your labor or worthiness.

They are entrusted to the Church.  
Your stewardship, then, is to receive them regularly and often,  
for the building up of His people...that's you.

Jesus' body and blood given to you in the bread and wine, are,  
as we pray, *salutary* (healthy) *gifts*, and *through them...*, that is by Jesus' body and blood,  
the Father *strengthens our faith in Him* and gives *fervent love toward one another*. (Collect of Thanksgiving: Form  
1; ELH p. 83)

Desiring to be faithful stewards of your gracious Master,  
then be faithful stewards of His Word  
for how can you know what pleases Him if you don't hear Him?  
Then come and be faithful stewards of His Sacraments,  
for how can you please Him if Christ is not found in you?

The Son says, **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added to you.** (Matthew 6:33)  
Seek Jesus' righteousness, His holiness, His forgiveness, His presence first,  
then all the spiritual and physical blessings the Lord chooses to bestow upon you  
will be seen for what they truly are, a stewardship from Him graciously given to you.

And on the Last Day, when the Master calls you to account, you will hear Him say,  
**'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things,  
I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.'** (Matthew 25:21)

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*