

In Nomine Iesu

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity 2023 Who is that faithful and wise manager – Luke 12:41-48

“{Peter said, ‘Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?’ And the Lord said, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, “My master is delayed in coming,” and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who established the ministry of Word and Sacrament for the sake of all His faithful people. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

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What prompted Jesus to ask, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?”

He had just told His disciples a parable about two suppers, one in which they were to wait for their Lord to return that they may serve Him, and the other where He, their Lord, suddenly **does return** and serves them. After warning them to be ready at all times for His sudden return, He concludes the parable: “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Luke 12:40)

At this point Peter, as the spokesman for the twelve, asks, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” Are You telling it to us your chosen twelve or to all who heard Your words today? Peter’s question is a good one. Was the parable said to them or to all. What is the answer? Is the parable for just pastors or for all?

I

There is no doubt that the parable has to do with the office of the ministry and the proper and right way it is to be carried out for, and in the midst of, Christ’s people. But to answer Peter’s question, is the parable of the two suppers intended for the ministers of His word and sacraments or for all who heard it? The parable is surely intended for both, because Jesus told it to both. He told it as an encouragement and a warning to both, for the good of both.

Jesus gave the office of the ministry of word and sacrament to His church as a whole. Now, to be sure the ministers are the ones who carry out that ministry. That is true. But they cannot do so without the support of the entire church. Because the people must support and uphold this ministry. It is their ministry, to be carried out

by the ministers they have called to serve them with word and sacrament in the name of their Lord and Savior. Therefore, both must understand the nature of the office Jesus would soon establish in their midst.

Jesus surely never intended that the apostles or any of their successors or any of the people they served to disbelieve His promise to return at a time they do not expect and so, begin “to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk.” (v. 45) This is something He, the Good Shepherd, never did. Nor did Jesus ever intend to keep His faithful people ignorant of the purpose of the office He would establish, and ignorant of their great need for the good news of forgiveness and mercy that this office was to proclaim in His name. This too is something Jesus never failed to do. He taught them constantly so that they might know the truth and be set free. He also taught them to recognize false prophets and to beware of them, even if they would show up in their own midst, as here!

But what of the other examples He gives? What of the “servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will”? And what of “the one who did not know [His master’s will], and did what deserved a beating”? What is Jesus describing here but two examples that fall somewhere between that of the “faithful and wise manager” and the one who beats those in his care, does selfish, irresponsible things instead of the work His Lord has given him to do, and is in fact an unbeliever? Is this not what we see in the visible Christian church all around us? The good ministry, the bad ministry, and the various degrees of ugly ministries? Is this not the actual state of the church and its ministry today?

II

Before we lose sight of what Jesus is teaching, let us go back to the question He posed to the twelve and to all who were listening to Him that day: “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”

You see, Jesus isn’t concerned simply with our being able to identify false teaching and false prophets in order to steer clear of them. He is here concerned chiefly with our **identifying the faithful and wise ones**, that both His pastors and His people should recognize, support, and uphold for the good of all, so that the unchanged and unchanging word and promise of God might sound forth clearly. Dear friends, **it does little good to recognize false teaching and faithless care of God’s people** if one cannot and does recognize and support the true teaching and the faithful care of God’s people, and to know – **and this is very important!** - that it is the will of our Lord that we make use of such faithful, true, and wise care.

We all know people who once went to church, listened to God’s word, and now do not anymore. How many of you have run into people who say: “I don’t go to church anymore because of this or that obvious false teaching”? “I don’t go to church anymore because of this or that poor example of Christ’s ministry this or that minister inflicted on me”? “I don’t go to church anymore because of this or that offense I experienced at this or that church?” I have met many such people. I think you have too. To be sure it is good that they recognized what was wrong, if it really was wrong. But what good do they expect to come from their recognition of

wrongdoing when they proceed to add more wrongdoing, and no longer hear God's word? When they forsake not only false teaching and faithless ministry, but **along with it** the genuine ministry Christ established! And what are they missing out on? For that let's go back to the parable that prompted Peter's question, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?"

Jesus said, "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. **Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.**" We are all, pastors and people, to stay "dressed for action," that is, clothed in the righteousness Christ covered us with in our baptism. We are all to keep our lamps burning, that is, keep our faith nourished and strengthened with word and sacrament. For we do not know when our Lord will return whether for the whole world or just for us at our death.

I ask you again Peter's question, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" And now, you know the answer. Jesus is telling the parable **to both** for the sake of **both**, so that **both** may be part of the great wedding feast to come, when the Bridegroom Himself will welcome all who have faithfully believed His word and its promises, which some "faithful and wise manager" whom Christ set over His household, proclaimed clearly and truly to us.

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Perhaps you know someone who has been spiritually beaten and misused in their experiences with the church and her ministry. Perhaps you are such a person yourself. Whatever evil happened, it was not by the will of Christ, who came to seek and to save the lost, in other words, to save us all. It was the fault of His servants, whether clergy or lay, for we all have sinned in this way. We all have let others down. We all deserve a beating, whether severe or light. But by the grace and mercy of Christ our Lord, we have been given the sure and certain hope of sitting at the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven forever through the ministry He established. Do not miss out on that because of any person who has disappointed you! Do not miss out on the heavenly home Christ prepared for you. He who was beaten severely, cut in pieces, and suffered the fate of the unfaithful in hell for you, comes to you here and now through the ministry He brought into being. Through it He invites you to sit at His table forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria