

## In Nomine Iesu

### The Ninth Sunday after Trinity 2024 Treasure and the human heart – Luke 16:1-9

“He 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.” And the manager said to himself, “What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.” So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, “How much do you owe my master?” He said, “A hundred measures of oil.” He said to him, “Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.” Then he said to another, “And how much do you owe?” He said, “A hundred measures of wheat.” He said to him, “Take your bill, and write eighty.” 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. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.””

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gives His great treasure to us. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

How much money is spent advertising by brokerage and investment services? Listen to radio and TV ads. Look at the mail that comes to you. Take note of the printed and internet ads. The sum is huge. It is big money chasing even bigger money. Look at all the luxuriously appointed casinos in America; that tells you who is making money when it comes to gambling. The impressive insurance, bank, and account services buildings that dominate the skyline of nearly every large American city tell you who is truly making and keeping money. This cannot be explained by politics or ideology. There is every bit as much money being manipulated in such places by politically left-leaning financiers as right-leaning, just as many progressive billionaires as there are conservative. The sons of this world understand that money is power and security.

People go to great lengths both to gain wealth and to preserve the wealth they have gained. Those who do not, dream about doing so. The truth is that we all spend a fair amount of time counting our money, adding up our debts, and estimating the cost of what we wish we had. And, sadly, I doubt there is a family here who doesn’t have at least one estranged relative due to squabbles over inheritance and money.

#### I

Our Lord commends the dishonest steward for his single-mindedness and zeal in using his master’s goods. He is shrewd. He knew what he wanted and he diligently worked to get it and keep it to safeguard his future. For this his master commended him, saying, “For the sons of this world are more shrewd than the sons of light.” Shrewd, worldly people guard their treasures carefully.

And here is the point our Lord would make with this parable: Even though the sons of light, Christians, have a far greater treasure, and one that will survive any and every stock market crash, every uncertainty of government policy! – and they know better

than the sons of this world what the future holds, they often guard their great and enduring treasure with less zeal than criminals guard their ill-gotten loot, less zeal than the steward who took advantage of his master.

The wealth of the world will not last. Its value is temporary. It never truly satisfies. Yet we can rattle off the price of what we desire: a new car, a new house, a dream vacation, the amount we'd really like to have in our pension account or the number of lottery millions we need to make us really happy and secure. We can and do do this with little effort. We even daydream about it. At the same time we are often unclear, uncertain, and even confused when someone asks us about the hope that is in us, the eternal hope we have in Jesus Christ, which is the far, far greater treasure.

Why is it that Mammon, that is, money is a master we all serve so much more readily and naturally than God? That is the question Jesus would have us consider in the story He tells us about the dishonest manager, that is, steward.

While we are at it, let's take note of what kind of a master this unjust steward has. He is like that crazy vineyard owner who pays out of his generosity according to his love instead of according to the labor done, whether twelve hours or one. He's like that father who gives the inheritance to his sons early and then still welcomes back the one who wasted all of it, only to give him more. He is like the farmer who scatters seed everywhere, stony ground, hard-packed, weed, thorn, and thistle infested. He is like that shepherd who doesn't slaughter his sheep or fleece them yet cannot stand to lose even one of them. The unjust steward's master is like a vineyard owner who isn't good at making a profit. He is like a father not consumed with preserving his fortune. He is not a farmer who carefully buys and sows his seed corn so as not to waste any of it and, so, cut his profits. No, the unjust steward's master is not good at business, at increasing size of the flock to increase profits, calculating as he does how to improve the quality of the meat or the fleece he takes from them. No, He's not good at business. **He is just good. And He is gracious.** He gave us His only begotten Son, who laid down His life for the sheep in order to fulfill His Father's gracious will.

The strange master of the unjust steward commended the steward for his shrewdness. He commended him for being so shrewd as to give away goods that were not even his, canceling the debt owed by his master's debtors in order to secure his future. You see, the point is that the steward's master is not like other masters. By this parable Jesus Christ showed us His Father's character, and the nature of the Kingdom of God – where goods are given away freely, debts are canceled, and liars, cheats, thieves – the unjust – are forgiven and loved.

## II

People go to great lengths and take great risks in order to gain and preserve wealth, but not so our God. Instead, He is like a man who finds a treasure buried in a field, then goes and sells everything He has in order to possess it. The treasure is worth everything to Him, even if it is worthless to others and even if He must give all to have it. He has found you buried in that potter's field, lost and rebellious, dwelling in the land of the dead and dying. The Father has given His all, His only begotten Son, to have you. He is a shepherd who loves so much a single sheep that He leaves the ninety-nine without thought to seek that solitary, lost sheep, and restore him to the fold. He does not calculate or analyze the cost. Nor is His Church a business or just a social group. Those are only shallow imitations of the Kingdom of God.

God is most certainly just and holy; but above all, He is good and gracious beyond imagining. He is one with us in Christ, yet He is not like us. He is holy. He bestows His holiness on us through holy things (Baptism, Absolution, Communion, the Word) even when we are still infected with Adam's sin. He gives us faith to trust in Him, to trust in a way beyond any trust in worldly security. Yet, because the old sinful nature is still with us, His ways baffle us and mock our wisdom. His ways are not our ways. But by the very faith that He has implanted in our hearts, we know that they are good ways, and that by grace His strange mercy endures forever and ever for us.

So then, fellow unjust stewards, what goods of the Lord have you wasted? All that you have you were given. How have you been negligent or miserly with God's love? Are you holding grudges? Secretly desiring vengeance? Willing to lie and cheat to gain honor with men? Have you treasured your pride more than the soul of whoever it is who has offended you? How have you violated God's law and spurned His gifts? It doesn't matter. He still wants you back. The debt you owe He cancels for the sake of His Son's bitter suffering and death. You are debt free. For He is not a master like the masters of men. He forgives. He gave His Son so He could forgive you.

The pure gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the great treasure of the Christian Church, is foolishness to world: That the Creator of heaven and earth loves so boundlessly that He would sacrifice His Son. It is a love so bent on giving it suffers our constant abuse and betrayal, a love so deep it cannot be exhausted. It cancels debts, ends death, and adopts rebels as His beloved children. Yet this is the incomprehensible love of God in Christ Jesus. This is the love that comes to us in word and sacrament, changing our hearts, making all things new. This is the love of God who so loved the world that He gave His Son. In His suffering, death, and resurrection Jesus Christ has canceled your debts. He has sealed you to Himself by water and the word. He feeds you in love with His body and blood. He encourages and teaches you His holy Word. These treasures moth and rust cannot ruin, nor thieves steal. These are the treasures of heaven that put into your possession, your heart, Christ Himself, who there preserves the promises for you, and who continues to come to you in word and sacrament. He is your brother. But unlike you, He is faithful. He does all things well. He takes only from what He has earned. He willingly gives away His goods and kingdom, and cancels all debts - not 20% or 50% like the unjust steward - but fully, finally, and freely, not with gold or silver, but with His own holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death.

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Why is it that Israel had thirteen tribes but only counted twelve? Why is it that the Church has thirteen apostles but counts twelve? Why were 5000 fed and yet baskets full of fish and bread remained? Why did it happen again with the 4000? Why did King David say in the psalms that his cup overflows? Isn't full enough? Why did Isaiah say the Lord gives double measure, shaken together, pressed down and still overflowing? Why? **Because your master loves to give**, loves to cancel debt; and His love cannot be contained in the vessels of men. He gives out His blessings, but then still holds the door open for more to come to us. He does so that His blessings to us may overflow to others. With God, there is always more. That is why we come here to receive His treasure to overflowing, and preserve it in our hearts. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**