

Pentecost 15 9/22/19
Luke 16:1-15 20C

OUR SERMON TEXT TODAY IS OUR GOSPEL LESSON FROM THE 16TH CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL.

Thomas Hooker was the Puritan clergyman who founded the state of Connecticut. As he lay dying, someone said to him: "You are going to receive the rewards of your labors." He replied: "I am going to receive mercy."

Mercy. That's what Jesus is teaching us about in our Gospel lesson today. The Parable of the Dishonest Manager, as our lesson is commonly known, can be a difficult passage of Scripture to understand. It may sound to us that Jesus is telling us to covet, lie, steal, and cheat to get ahead in life. But notice, Jesus is not commending the actions of the dishonest manager nor teaching us that we should follow in his dishonest ways. The focus of the parable is the mercy of the master. Even when the manager coveted, stole, lied; the master did not even demand that the dishonest steward be punished. Even though his steward is an outright scoundrel, the master is merciful. **JESUS IS TEACHING US THAT LIKE THE MASTER IN THE PARABLE, GOD IS MERCIFUL.**

"All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee," we sang in our hymn. All that we have is a trust from God and our Father in heaven has so richly opened His hand to give us our daily bread, that we are called upon to manage for Him. Like the manager in the parable, we are not the owner. And like that manager in the parable who wasted his master's possessions, we have wasted what God has entrusted to us.

It seems that our entire identity and well-being are warped up in our material things. Our flesh would have us believe that if you drive a bigger,

more expensive car; if you wear more expensive jeans than your neighbor does; if you own more land, if you are more popular with the kids at school, if you can hit the golf ball further than your neighbor, then, most certainly, you are a better person than your neighbor, right? That is the thinking of the sinful nature! The way we look at our money and goods truly shows how self-centered, selfish, idolatrous, we are; how much we love ourselves more than our neighbor.

By the way, in the parable, did you notice what happened to the dishonest steward? Charges, accusations, were brought to the owner about his manager. You know what it is like to be accused all too well, don't you, Dear Child of God? Satan is the accuser, and he accuses you night and day without ceasing, reminding of your failures, all those times you have been an unfaithful, dishonest manager of what God has entrusted to you and asked of you. And Satan accuses you, until like the Psalmist, your very bones ache in guilt and shame.

In our parable this morning, Jesus is teaching us about God, our Father in heaven. The Good News of the Gospel is that God does not treat us as our sins deserve. We learn from our parable that God is merciful, loving, and forgiving.

God loved us so that He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for all. Think about this for a minute: God sent His only-begotten Son into this world, to be a steward, a manager, of ... sin and all its wages of death. St. Paul says it this way, "For our sake, He made Him (that is, Jesus, the Son) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we (that is, we poor sinners) might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21)." For us and for our salvation, Jesus became the steward of UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, the unrighteousness of our sin and all its wages of

death. Jesus carried to the cross, upon His own body, all those times we forgot our stuff wasn't ours; all the times we misused and abused what God had entrusted to us; all our sin; and upon the cross extended, He paid the debt of all our sin. And that means you are forgiven.

Did you notice in the parable what the master did after his wasting and his dishonesty? "The master commended the dishonest manager... (v. 8)." That's what the Father did to His Steward of Unrighteousness. The 3rd day, He raised His Son to life again and highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, (cf. Ph 2:9). Risen and ascended, He comes to give us the forgiveness, life, and salvation that He won for us with His innocent suffering and death.

Baptized and living in Christ Jesus, we are the Stewards of Righteousness, which is why you were asked in your Confirmation vows, "Do you intend to hear the Word and God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?" You were asked that because that is how God does His work in you. And to be a faithful steward of Christ's righteousness means that you will be faithful in your use of His Word and Sacraments, so that Christ can do His work in you.

In the water and Word of our Baptism, God the Holy Spirit works faith within us, faith so that we trust, rejoice, and find comfort in Christ alone. And, every day we live out that faith in our thoughts, words, and deeds, serving our neighbor and glorifying God in that service to our neighbor.

We come to the Lord's Table that we may be fed with the life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus, to be forgiven and strengthened that we may believe God's Word and live a holy life according to it. And we gladly hear and learn God's Word, in worship, our private devotions, teaching it to our children, for the words of Jesus are spirit and life.

And as a steward of the riches of Christ, we remember how Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgiveness us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Sin hurts, doesn't it? It especially hurts when your neighbor has sinned against you, offended and hurt you badly. In the rich man in the parable, Jesus is also teaching you about you, Dear Child of God. You are rich -- rich in Christ and you see yourself as the master who has lost a sizeable portion of his estate, through the dishonesty of his manager. But, he does not treat his manager as his sins deserve. He is merciful. The manager knew, above all else, that he could rely upon his master to be merciful and forgiving.

So it is for your neighbor who has sinned against you. You forgive and gladly do it to your neighbor, even the one who has sinned against you, because Christ lives in you and you live in Christ, and you are a reflection of Christ to your neighbor, which means you forgive, just as Christ has forgiven you.

And as a steward of the riches of Christ, we also remember Jesus has taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." When we pray those words, we are praying that God would use us -- and our money -- to extend His Kingdom of Grace (*cf. Small Catechism*).

As a steward of Christ, being Christ to your neighbor, you care as much Christ our Lord Himself cares about their spiritual and their physical needs. Loving our neighbor as ourselves, we see our material possessions and wealth as a trust from God, that He has given to us in our to show our love for our neighbor in their need. In doing that, we are merciful, just as our Father in heaven is merciful.

That, Dear Saints, is the life of a steward. Faith never asks, "How much do I have to give"? Faith asks, "How great are the needs of my

neighbor?” Faith never thinks of Christian giving as an obligation that you dislike wholeheartedly. Faith looks at giving as a most wonderful opportunity God has given you to show mercy toward your neighbor.

The fact that you now can show mercy is evidence that God has begun His work in you: forgiving you your sins, giving you the gift of faith, and producing in you the fruit of faith.

To God be the Glory. Amen.