

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity
6 August, Anno Domini 2023
St. Luke 16:1-13

Beloved stewards of God's kingdom,

As the Baptized, you have been given all things in Christ. The God who made and sustains all things in heaven and on earth is YOUR Father, your fountain and source of every good thing. There is nothing you have that isn't from Him. There is nothing you need that He will not give at the proper time. The Blood of the Son of God has redeemed you out of the tyranny and slavery of the devil where all your working and striving only further condemned you and robbed you of life. You are sons and daughters of the Most High God. You are inheritors of His kingdom - a kingdom of grace and peace and mercy. A kingdom where debts are fully pardoned. A kingdom where rights are exercised for the benefit of your neighbor. A kingdom where truth, not desire, is the highest good. A kingdom where righteousness is given as a gift to the unrighteous. A kingdom where the innocent suffer that the guilty might be blessed.

And as children of this kingdom, you have been given stewardship over this kingdom, a trust to be kept and used until your Lord returns. On that day you will give an account of your stewardship. You don't own this kingdom. It is not given to you to do with it according to your own will. Rather this stewardship has been entrusted to you that you might make full use of it according to the will of the Lord. It is His kingdom and you are not free to waste it. Your talents, your thoughts, your treasures, your body, your time, your love, your possessions, your mercy, your forgiveness, your words, and above all these, His Word, the true and only Gospel of salvation for the sake of Jesus Christ - these are all placed into your hands to be pressed into the service of your Lord. We will hear again of this stewardship when we receive Mike, Christina, and Elizabeth into membership in just a few minutes. They, as we each have, will give their assent to this stewardship when they acknowledge the gifts that God bestowed upon them in Baptism, when they renounce the devil and his works, when they confess the Holy Scriptures, when they make known their desire and intention, to be regular in their hearing of the Word of God, in their reception of the Lord's Supper, in living lives that are in keeping with the Word of God, and in remaining steadfast in this confession of faith in the face of persecution and even death.

And what would He have you do with all of the gifts He has bestowed upon you? Give them away. Be a blessing to those around you. This is the ONLY way in

which your Lord wants you to steward His gifts. He doesn't want them buried in the ground and not used. He doesn't want them used to enrich yourself. He doesn't want you to measure the cost of giving them. He doesn't want you to trade them for trinkets and junk. He doesn't want them despised because you wanted different gifts. He wants them given away freely, generously, cheerfully even as they have been freely and generously given to you. This is your duty. This ought to be your joy.

Have you considered your stewardship of Christ's precious gifts? What if our Lord called us in to give an accounting of our stewardship today? Would you be counted a faithful steward? Or should your stewardship be taken from you? Consider your life in light of the Ten Commandments. Have you humbled yourself before the Lord and delighted yourself only in Him and His Word? Have you taken His Name in vain for frivolous, unimportant, and even evil things, using your righteousness as a cloak for sin? Have you filled your home, your heart, and your mind with daily prayer and the Word of God, calling upon Him every time of need? And what of your household? Do you rejoice to gather with the whole body of Christ on the Lord's Day to hear God speak and be fed with the very Body of Blood of the One who died to save you? Have you honored those in authority, even and especially those with whom you disagree? Have you helped and supported your neighbor in every physical need regardless of the cost to you? Have you loved and cherished and honored marriage with pure thoughts, words of praise, and discipline of your flesh? Have you sought to improve your neighbor's well-being and rejoiced in his successes even when his gain was your loss? Have you defended and protected the good name of your neighbor, speaking up in his defense? Have you rejoiced and been content with your daily bread, whether it seemed like a lot or just enough to get by?

We don't have to give it too much thought before we realize that we have been poor and even at times wicked stewards of the Lord's things. We have hoarded and hidden and wasted His gifts. We have withheld the Word of God from those who needed to hear it. We have neglected our duties. We have treated what we have been given as something which we have earned and deserved. We have acted as masters rather than stewards. We daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. We have chased after what is pleasurable and easy rather than what is good and godly. We have neglected God and our neighbor, taking our portion from the top and giving them what might be left if anything at all.

Repent before the Lord calls you to give an account. Repent and turn to the true and faithful Steward of God's kingdom, the Lord Jesus Christ, who stands always

at the ready to lavish the mercy and forgiveness of His Father upon you. He invites you to kneel down in confession so that He might say to you "I have taken your bill of debt and crossed it out so that it now reads 'Paid in full'. I have offered My life, My faithful stewardship, My Blood as the payment for your guilt." You owe the Father nothing in Christ except to believe that it is true. You can't repay even the smallest amount of your debt. That is not the way. Neither can you make yourself a better steward sufficient to earn His favor. Only confess that you have abused your stewardship, you have wasted your Father's things, and then receive the righteousness that He bestows upon you, that He has bestowed upon you in Holy Baptism and which He feeds you in Holy Communion. Thus forgiven, you will hear words that are a total shock to the senses, words that stand in contrast to your stewardship - "Well done, good and faithful steward. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of you master." None of us deserve to hear those words, not even the most pious among us. But they are spoken by Christ Jesus into the ears of all who treasure His mercy and love the means of His grace above all the riches and pleasures of this world.

And this brings us back to our Lord's words today. Why is such an obviously unfaithful steward put before us as an example? What can we possibly learn from him? His zealousness to carry out that which he believed to be in his best interest. He, of course, was zealous in his selfishness and wickedness. You are to be equally and even more zealous in what is good and true and right because you, through the Holy Scriptures, know what is actually good for both you and your neighbor. And knowing that it is generosity and forgiveness and mercy and love that have been entrusted to you from God and that these things are not only pleasing to Him but actually beneficial for you and others, how zealous should we be in carrying them out, whether or not the world understands or even wants these things? Indeed, we know that the world hates these things and is completely confounded by them because they know neither Jesus nor His Father. They hate the kingdom of God. And they will hate you. They will even persecute you for being a faithful steward because they remain under the tyranny of Satan kingdom. So be it. In fact, let us, for that very reason, be all the MORE zealous in good works. We should rejoice in the will and commandments of God and with all eagerness and joy do them, even as our Lord did.

And because you know that you have already been given everything in Christ, you are actually free to be a good and faithful steward. You know for certain that nothing you need has been or will be withheld from you. You know that even your crosses are blessings sent from God to do you good. And you know that your love and mercy and compassion shown to your neighbor is a great benefit and blessing

to them because through these things they can come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus, the very source of your own peace and joy.

God grant that we, who have been rescued from slavery to sin and death and from Satan's dominion of darkness, may be consumed by pure and holy zealously for the things of God and His kingdom. May we, covered in the Blood of Christ's righteousness, be faithful stewards of all that God has so richly and lavishly bestowed upon us so that in and through our stewardship, the love and mercy of God may be known in all the world and all may glory His saving Name.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.