

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity
28 July, Anno Domini 2024
St. Luke 16:1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

How often do we separate our life in Christ from how we understand the rest of our life? How often do we receive the unfathomable generosity of God's mercy and forgiveness only to step out into the world and set our eyes back again toward worldly success and accumulating for ourselves worldly treasures? It is a false separation that breeds greed, selfishness, and hatred because it spreads a false Christian veneer over what is evil. It is rooted in the false notion that you are beholden to no one as though you willed yourself into existence, as though you answer only to you and owe no one anything. That is demonic. Every talent, every resource, every experience, our families, our jobs, our bodies, where we live, even every weakness - all of these God gives and arranges for the singular purpose of putting us into contact with those who need to hear the Gospel. There's your purpose-driven life. It's not to bring world peace, end hunger, cure cancer. Your purpose is to be the vehicle by which the Word of God goes forth into the world and the Holy Spirit draws sinners to Jesus and into the Christian Church.

Jesus said "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth." In other words, use the earthly things that you have been blessed with as a means to reach out to your relatives, friends, and neighbors. Use these things to open up opportunities to share the Gospel so that they too might believe in Jesus Christ and share in the peace and joy of heaven with you. Could there be a better use for anything placed into your stewardship than to be able to press it into use to serve the kingdom of God? Would you consider anything wasted if it served to open opportunities to share the Gospel and snatch people from eternal death?

This is the nature of God and His kingdom of grace. It's really even true of His kingdom of power in many ways. All that God has and is He uses to benefit you. All His power, all His wisdom, all His love, all His energy. All of it He daily and richly pours out to you so that you have the daily bread that you need to care for your body - the food, the clothes, the medical care, the home, the running water, the sunshine, the rain, the car. He truly does hold the whole world, all of creation, in His merciful hand. He certainly doesn't need creation for Himself. He is an odd

king in this way - His greatest joy is in giving away the things of His kingdom.

But of all the things God loves to give away, nothing brings Him more joy than to pour out the riches of His mercy in Jesus Christ, His Son. He takes no pleasure in seeing any man perish for his sins. It doesn't matter how thoroughly we deserve to have to pay the whole debt of our guilt in the fires of judgment, it doesn't matter how grievously we have acted in hatred of God or our neighbor - God desires to save us, to lavish upon us the complete and free forgiveness of all our sins and set us free from slavery to our flesh which kills. If you doubt that, then consider that He didn't spare His only-begotten and sinless Son to have you. The Father's mercy is so incomprehensible that He would rather have His innocent Son suffer divine wrath and judgment than you.

And now, we might imagine, as sinful flesh is so prone to do, that such a gift and treasure must be earned by the very best of our efforts. At the very least, having been given such a gift surely we should have to work and strive to show how thankful and committed we are to God. Repent. Could there be anything so offensive as to rob God of the joy of saving you and to arrogantly suggest that there was anything you could or should offer to Him in repayment? Salvation, like everything else God gives, is a gift to you given freely by God because He wants you to have it. In every way, God pours out His gifts to you so that you might trust alone in Him, so that you might know Him to be the one, true God. Whether it's daily bread or the bread of Christ's holy flesh, God gives these things in abundance because your life, temporally and eternally, are His concern.

And thus, when God, in His abundant mercy showers His blessings upon us, whether they are physical or spiritual, He expects you to be as liberal in sharing them as He is. There is no earning or deserving here. The things of His kingdom are meant to be shared generously, even foolishly. This is most especially true of the forgiveness which He daily and richly gives through His Church. Inasmuch as God gladly forgives all your sins, the sins you know and the sins you don't and the sins you are afraid to name, He would have you do likewise - daily and richly forgive those who sin against you, hold nothing against them, wipe away their debts for them, bless them when they curse you, love them when they hate you. You will lose nothing and gain everything.

The same is true of your life, your health, your wealth, your talents and abilities. These are given to you, not to hoard or save up for yourself (that would be to waste your heavenly Master's possessions as an unrighteous steward), but to serve your neighbor, to help him in his need. And, Lord-willing, when you do, you may find

yourself face-to-face with the opportunity to see the Lord bring another precious lamb into the fold! What earthly loss will you think of when you are standing before the throne of Lamb with that neighbor who heard the Gospel first from your mouth? No mercy that you share with your neighbor, no earthly blessing that you expend in spreading the Gospel, will ever be wasted. “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.” Forgive, share, bless, help, comfort. Be merciful, even as your Father in heaven is merciful.

But woe to us if we do what is actually wasteful of the Lord’s rich blessings. Woe to us if we use what is given to simply puff ourselves up and fill our own barns or even to simply make people like us. Woe to us if we hoard the Lord’s riches in fear that He will not always provide what is needed. We are but stewards of our Lord’s things and the Lord would have His things distributed. As one entrusted with the mercies of Christ, you are to make sure that anyone who is in need of that mercy gets it, more than they need. Woe to you if you will not. Woe to you if you would hold a grudge. Woe to you if you would withhold comfort and aid. Woe to you if having your way is more important than being reconciled to your brother. Woe to you if you would withhold the truth so that you may be comfortable. God most certainly didn’t lavish His mercy and forgiveness upon you so that you could withhold it from others. But if you refuse, if you waste the mercy given into your charge by running up the debts of others, then be certain of this, your stewardship will be taken from you. You will no longer taste the Lord’s mercy for yourself and you will be forced to pay the entire debt of your sin alone for all eternity.

Beloved in the Lord, the mercy of God endureth forever. It is a well so deep that you cannot exhaust it. And there is nothing more pleasing to your Lord than that you drink deeply of that mercy, that He may wash away the fullness of your sin, satisfy your hunger and thirst for true righteousness, and bestow upon you the inheritance of eternal life. May you taste and see God’s rich mercy and so be stirred up to pour out that rich mercy upon all around you who stand in need of the same. And may you be blessed to see the fruits of that mercy standing with you around the marriage feast of Lamb, singing the praises of our merciful God.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts

and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.