

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 16:1-9
17 August, Anno Domini 2025

Beloved of God, bound together by the rich mercy of God in the Blood of Jesus Christ,

Let us pray. “Heavenly Father, grant us your Holy Spirit this day that we may hear your Word in faith and rightly receive the truth which you would teach us though our flesh would resist. Help us to submit ourselves to the divine wisdom of your mercy. Remove whatever stumbling blocks lie before us that we may rightly hear, believe, and conform our thoughts, words, and actions, to your Holy Word; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

The parable before us, one of the most challenging in Scripture, displays for us the true character of God as merciful but in a way that is meant to send shockwaves through our flesh. God shows Himself to delight in receiving back into His fellowship those who had previously wandered away from Him. More than that, as the God who actually seeks out those who have sinned against Him to save them, telling them what He has done for them, because He doesn't want to lose them to eternal destruction.

As we see in the parables from the previous chapter - the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son - God doesn't simply dismiss those who have left the fold. He goes and He finds them. His love is greater than their foolishness or even just their weakness. He isn't concerned about the why because their absence is dangerous to them and He loves them. He isn't interested in seeing them get what they deserve. It doesn't matter that, of course, He hasn't done anything wrong. He is not motivated by rights or fairness but by love which brought Him to humble Himself to rescue us rather than demand that we do our fair part because we got ourselves into this mess. He the innocent, bore the full responsibility of the guilty and unfairly but joyfully, did what was demanded of us that we might be reconciled and joined to Him.

Now, turning away from the Pharisees and scribes who had no use for God's mercy, Jesus turns to His disciples. Particularly, but not exclusively, I would argue, based on Jesus' use of the example of a steward, Jesus gives this parable to those in the pastoral office whom He will send out in His name as stewards of His things, and gives them direction as to how they are to faithfully manage the things of their Lord.

As the prior parables have shown, God is exceedingly rich in His mercy toward us poor, miserable sinners. Sinners surely deserve nothing but punishment from God's hand. We don't deserve our daily bread and we certainly don't deserve salvation. We don't deserve His patience or understanding. We don't deserve His forbearance with our foolishness. We deserve to be forced to pay every last penny of the terrible debt of our sin - a debt which, of course, we could never pay. We deserve for Him to be angry with us, to turn away from us and write us off. That would certainly be just and it's what we deserve. And while it's certainly true that one of God's attributes is that He is a perfectly just God, that justice is shaped by and fulfilled in His mercy. For this reason, God would rather punish our sins in His Son, rather than condemn us. God searches for lost sheep and coins. He welcomes back, without an ounce of retribution, those wretched sons who have wasted their inheritance in reckless and worldly living, in making foolish, loveless, and self-destructive decisions. He restored us as sons - freely. No making up for what we had done, no paying Him back, no time of parole to prove ourselves. He suffered in Himself what we justly deserved so that we didn't have to. What brings joy to God and the angels is one lost sinner who is restored to the fold.

And so, when Jesus turns to His disciples, He is turning to those who have tasted this great mercy and will be made stewards of it. And in that light this parable is directed at all of the baptized. It is God who is the rich man in the parable before us today - a God rich in mercy and love for sinners. All that He is and has and does is rooted in His desire that everyone live eternally with Him in His kingdom. God absolutely wants everyone to receive the benefits of His mercy. There isn't a single person whom the Lord wishes to suffer the consequences of their sins. Not all will, sadly. But that's only because they refused it. There isn't a sinner out there to whom the Lord wouldn't gladly say "I have put your sins away from you. Come, feast on riches of my kingdom. Enjoy everything that I have shed my Blood to obtain for you. Sit down with your bill quickly and zero out the balance. In fact, I will gladly fill your account to overflowing with peace and joy and give you an inheritance in my kingdom. You will have all that you need and, more often than not, you will have more than you need for your daily bread."

This is exactly what Jesus is directing His disciples to do - freely distribute the mercy and the grace of God by canceling the debt of sin. In other words, give away God's things! Be merciful and long-suffering, especially to your brothers and sisters in Christ, as God your heavenly Father is merciful and long-suffering with you. To be sure, showing mercy requires great sacrifice, perhaps the greatest sacrifice of all - the sacrifice of pride and our sense of justice. Christ, the Lord of

all knows this sacrifice better than any of us. He, HE, humbled Himself, stooped beneath Himself for you and for me. He showed us this in the Upper Room on the night of His betrayal as He, the God who created and sustains the universe, took the lowest position possible, that of a servant, to wash the filth of the disciples feet, to cleanse them and to cleanse you of the damning stain of your sin against Him. He allowed the deepest injustices to be done to Him - blasphemy, mockery, thorns pressed into His head, nails cruelly driven into His hands and feet that He might put through the one of the most excruciating and humiliating deaths imaginable - all to have mercy upon you. You are the joy that was set before Him and why He was most willing to gladly suffer all these things. Mercy indeed requires sacrifice. But the fruit of that mercy is priceless. And those who would enjoy the peace of that mercy from the crucified Christ, must be willing to likewise humble themselves and show that mercy to their fellow sinners.

That's the thing about mercy. It's meant to be given away - freely. It is always directed outward toward those who need it. There's no such thing as deserving mercy. This is what the unrighteous manager gets wrong. He believes that his master is interested in filling his own pockets. But he's not. God does nothing, nothing, to benefit Himself. He doesn't use His power, His wisdom, or His wealth for Himself. He gives it away, though it cost Him His greatest treasure, His beloved Son. He wants to flood the world with it. He wants it poured out to the ends of the earth. God fervently desires that YOU receive His mercy and nothing makes Him happier than to give it to you.

And He wants it given away precisely to sinners like us who don't deserve even the smallest crumb. It can't be preached or believed too much - God's greatest desire is that wretches be saved and made sons of light. Wretches like us who feverishly chase after the desires of our flesh rather than hear and study and meditate on God's Word; who despise weakness and chase after strength; who cast off those who have sinned against us in order to guard our egos and walk the easier and less humiliating path; who lust after success and independence; whose thoughts are most often filled with ourselves and how to have, be, think, and do more, bigger, and better; who would rather turn away from and look down on the weak and broken rather than inconvenience and dirty ourselves so that we might suffer with them and bear their burden. God would save us from such utter foolishness so that we might know the joy of His mercy and so share that mercy freely with others.

No, we are not like God. First us. Then, if there there is a little left over we might share it. But not too much. God certainly wouldn't want us just giving our stuff

away! Responsible people collect on their debts. That's why the parable makes absolutely no business sense. We are always using what we have been given to get more believing that's why it was given in the first place. How great it will be when people and God look at us and admire us for our wit, our wealth, and our wisdom! "They will sing my praises and tell me how wonderful I am."

But God isn't impressed. He isn't interested in collecting on debts. He's interested in forgiving them, wiping them absolutely clean, bearing the full responsibility of that debt. He is interested in being restored to you so that you may be with Him and have a share in all of the blessings of His kingdom. He didn't freely forgive you your sins so that you could turn around and hold grudges against those who have sinned against you even though they may be acting, foolishly, childishly, and fully deserve it. Our Lord says "He who would be greatest among you must become the servant of all." Nothing was given to you so you would go and build yourself bigger barns. He doesn't give you a good income so that you can be richer. He gives you what you have so that your needs would be met and then with the same reckless generosity you would joyfully share with those through whom, in your various vocations, God lays a claim upon you - your time, your prayers, your skills, your wisdom, and your money. If you would give to God in thankfulness, forgive them and give to them. God places before you those who need the things with which God has first blessed you - your spouse, your children, your family, your church, your neighbors, your boss and colleagues, your community, your country.

And you do not need to be afraid to help them. You will not lose anything. We have recently heard Christ promise us that "with the measure you use, it will be measured back to us." How can you lose anything when the Lord of heaven and earth is the One who is looking out for you, even better than you can? God has given to you freely. The only way to mismanage what He has given is to keep it for yourself. That isn't pleasing to Him. If you do, don't be surprised when He takes away your management from you. Consider our Savior's words about dealing with the sins of our brother: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault (not, "wait for him to recognize it and come to you"), between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Mtt. 18:15) What greater joy can there be than to be restored to your brother and share here on earth the unity that we long for in heaven around Christ's throne?

God hasn't withheld a single good thing from you that you needed, beginning with the full and free forgiveness of all your sins and that long before you asked. That is truly the work of the Church, those called to be pastors in Christ's Church, and

every Christian who is a member of that blessed body - to pour forth the mercy of Christ, to proclaim to repentant sinners everywhere the good news that their debt has been wiped out by Jesus, to administer the things of Christ to those in need - Christ's absolution, Christ's Word, Christ's Baptism, and Christ's Supper. All are to receive their appropriate portions at the proper time. As each has need of the Law's judgement and the Gospel's forgiveness, they are to be given without hesitation and without changing them. By extension, every Christian, as those who have tasted the sweet cup of Christ's mercy, is to pour out that mercy to all who are in need, just as it has been poured out to you.

Pray to God that we don't receive this mercy in vain and then, like the Corinthians Christians, use our Christian freedom as an excuse to walk again in all the ways of darkness and selfishness that we have been rescued from. May God grant that we do not become arrogant and wrongly imagine that in Christ we now have been given license to live as the unbelieving world lives - for itself and its own desires and glory. What a sad witness it is when those who have known the great mercy and blessing of God then withhold themselves and their gifts; when neighbor's needs go unmet; when prayers are not lifted to God's throne; when our churches, the very places where God's forgiveness and mercy are poured out, are ripped apart because Christians deal coldly and mercilessly with one another; when our communities crumble under the poison of materialism and secular humanism because God's people would rather withdraw than suffer the world's scorn for speaking up and exposing the world's dark wickedness with the bright light of God's Word. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

May God grant us repentance for mismanaging His gifts and refresh us with the abundance of His mercy. May He so strengthen us to use all the gifts that He has given, spiritual and material, in order to be a blessing and help to our neighbors so that they too might rejoice with us in our Lord who delights in giving away the great riches of His kingdom.

In the Name of +Jesus.