

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity
St. Luke 16:1-13
2 August, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved in Christ and heirs of His eternal kingdom,

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

In the parable that is set before us today, our Lord is teaching His children about true wisdom. Strangely, however, to do that Jesus sets before us the example of a swindler, an unfaithful steward who essentially robbed his master one last time before being given the boot.

The steward was desperate. He had been caught wasting his master's possessions and now he was going to get tossed out. We can be certain that however the steward was being wasteful, he was somehow benefitting from it. He had been trying to enrich himself at his master's expense but now the game was up and he was going to be out on his ear. But instead of suffering the humiliation of begging or trying to take up manual labor which he couldn't do, he used his master's possessions to guarantee that he would be invited in and cared for by someone else.

Now, at first, it seems odd that Jesus would use such a dishonest and selfish individual as an example for us to emulate. But it is actually quite brilliant. Jesus is focusing our attention not on the steward's particular methodology but on his willingness to do whatever it took to ensure the kind of life that he wanted in this world and his willingness to use the things of others to achieve that. That is what Jesus means when He says "Make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." (Lk. 16:9)

All around us everyday we see people willing to go to ridiculous and even illegal lengths to get their way in this world. Ponzi schemes; manipulation; legal loopholes; endless hours in traffic to spend endless hours at the office away from their family so that maybe, just maybe, they will get that promotion or that raise; pay exorbitant interest rates so that they can have what they want right now rather than wait until they can actually afford it; pay not so small fortunes trying to eek out a few more days on this earth, keep up with the latest styles, or make sure that no one thinks they've gotten any older; spend hours playing video games for imaginary rewards or just so that they can say they beat the game. And all this time and

money and energy for what? At best, things that are wasting away and will one day perish. At worst, for evil or for even nothing at all.

But this is exactly what Jesus is commending to us. Do you see to what end the unbeliever is willing to go to obtain things that don't matter, things that can be lost just as quickly as they are gained and that will all be destroyed on the last day? Do you see how they devote themselves with almost singular purpose to having and achieving things that have no lasting value? God's children should be that zealous and even more so for the things of eternal life not only for ourselves but for our families, our friends, and our neighbors. We should be so driven to hear the Word of God, pray, confess, forgive, remember our Baptism, and receive the Lord's Supper because these are the only things that provide the peace and security of eternal life, these alone endure forever. Truly, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ has set us free from the endless and fruitless exhaustion of chasing after things that don't matter. The world is terrified that it is going to miss out on something if it isn't constantly trying to have everything this world offers. Unbelievers either know nothing or care nothing for eternity and so nothing terrifies them more than the prospect of dying without having experienced or purchased everything in this world.

Think about elite athletes who eat, sleep, and breath their sport. Their parents likely spent tens of thousands of dollars and untold hours on their training. There was no time for devotions because practices let out late and there was still homework to do before bed. Their social life was and is largely non-existent. They have no church because Sunday morning was the only available time for games and practices. Many have forsaken the commitment of having a family because it would take time away from their training. And what was the reward of the very few that made it - a trophy, a gold medal, applause that has long faded away, bodies that begin to collapse under the constant pushing and pounding, a lonely death because there is no family to sit and hold their hand, no pastor to come and pray with them and comfort them with God's Word, no certainty of salvation because they had spent their life chasing after the perishing crowns of this world instead of being devoted to the means of grace which alone give the imperishable crown of eternal life.

Their eyes were laser-focused, but on the wrong things, the things that didn't matter. They honed their craft and became the best at it. But in the end everything they had worked so hard for came to nothing, it didn't matter. Suddenly, the opportunity to obtain the eternal treasures is gone and the only thing they will have for eternity is those terrible words ringing in their ears "I never knew you. Depart from Me,

you worker of lawlessness.”

When we or our children “ooh” and “aah” and covet the lives of people who have a lot of money or who are famous or who have set records, do we stop to think what having such things costs? Do we ask about their eternal salvation? When we covet the neighbor who retired at 50 and has two vacation homes and is constantly taking trips, do we consider whether they have given any attention to the things of eternal life, whether or not they will be in heaven?

That is what our Lord is asking us today. What are you focused on? What things receive your time, your money, and your energy? Is it perishable things? Have you been doggedly chasing after worldly things, things that will pass away, and ignoring the eternal things? Children of God, be like the elite athletes and workaholics but not after the same things. You know of the eternal riches that Christ has prepared for you, riches that will never fade, that neither moth nor rust nor soaring interest rates or global upheaval or even death will be able to destroy! Christ has told you about the free pardon of all your sins which He obtained on the cross by which you are received into His eternal kingdom! You know the Word of life which He has caused to be written down so that you may hear it, read it, believe it, and by believing have life in His Name and be spared from eternal judgment! You know exactly how you can face death with a clean conscience, with the joy and certainty that you are going to join the company of the blessed saints and angels around the throne of Christ! You know that in the Holy Communion the very Body and Blood of God Himself are given to you as true food and true drink which nourishes you in both body and soul, assuring to you the mercy of God and the resurrection to eternal life. You know the things that make for peace even when the world is crumbling around you, when the health of your body is failing, and even friends and family forsake you. The world knows nothing about these things and yet see how feverishly it chases after foolishness, how the unbeliever will sacrifice everything in return for things that are of no true value! Let us with the same and even greater dogged determination seek after the eternal things of God’s kingdom and not let anything distract us or keep us from them.

Wealth, beauty, recognition, friends, the praise of the world - these don’t bring you eternal life. Your flesh may love them, the world praises them, and the devil is constantly trying to pull your heart toward them so that you will join the wild goose chase down the broad path that leads to eternal destruction. That is exactly why such things are dangerous and must be approached with great caution.

We have had two reminders thrust before us again this past week of how fleeting

life is and how vitally important the things of Christ are. One, Cristine's brother, Doug Drawe, whose body finally succumbed to the cancer that had spread throughout his body. The other, a brother in Christ from Faith in Plano who was known by many of us, Keith Leicht, a healthy man in his fifties who died suddenly after exercising as his family was waiting for him so that they could have family devotions. For both of those men, in the blink of an eye, every accomplishment, every experience, every earthly thing that either of these men had come to nothing. The only things that mattered, were the things that you and I are gathered here to receive from the gracious hand of our Lord - the forgiveness of our sins and the life of our God and Savior which He gives in the food of His Body and Blood, the Word which leads us into all truth which we must make the opportunity to hear not only for ourselves but for our family and our neighbors because one day, a day unknown to any of us, they too will draw their last breath. We want them to draw that breath in the peace and confidence of faith that has been fed and nourished and strengthened by the means of grace. "O Lord, teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)

Christ calls each of His children to faithful stewardship of everything that He has entrusted to us. Whether that is your body, your mind, your time, your abilities, your children, your money, your house, your job, your vocations, or even your free time - none if it is your personal possession. We are only stewards. You are not free to use a single bit of it however you feel like. All of it, including you, belong to God. He created you, He redeemed you with the Blood of His Son, and everything He has graciously entrusted to you is to be used for His purposes. Whether that is the means of grace or the unrighteous mammon - press it all into the purpose of obtaining the heavenly treasure and enriching others with it as well.

We can make all the excuses that we want to justify our mismanagement, but the Lord is not fooled. We can say we don't have time to read the Bible or go to church or have family devotions but He sees clearly how much time we spend watching TV, so much of which is either filled with lies or things that promote ungodly behavior, or how much time we spend indulging our hobbies. We can say that we can't afford to tithe in order to support the means of grace and help those in need or make sure that our children are being educated according to the Word of God, but God sees how many streaming services we pay for, how much we are willing to spend on new cars and phones and gym memberships and new clothes and vacations and investments and the latest things that promise to make us beautiful and our lives easier. And the irony is that the more of these things we fill our pockets with the more anxious we become because now we fear losing them and then there is some other new thing the everyone tells us we "have to have".

We know well that we have not always been faithful stewards. How often have we been eager to leave church and don't even stay a little while longer to study the Bible with our brothers and sisters in Christ just so that we can get back out to the world's things? How often, even when we are in our Father's house to receive His gifts, do our minds wander to earthly and vain and even sinful things? What truly rich treasure God has given to us and yet how frivolously and foolishly we have so wasted it. We haven't used our Lord's gracious gifts for the eternal things. We have so often used them for ourselves, for things that are not only passing away but sometimes are even harmful. We have not made our salvation and the salvation of our family not simply one concern among many, but the chief concern which governs and determines all others. We know that we should be dismissed from our management of the Lord's things. We know that we haven't been faithful with the unrighteous wealth and certainly shouldn't be entrusted with the heavenly riches. God grant us true repentance for wasting the things of God by using them for our own selfish, fleshly, fleeting purposes rather than the godly, eternal purposes for which He gave them.

And we have this promise, that the Lord is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love, having eagerly and willingly pressed what was most precious to Him, His own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, into the service of our eternal life. He delights in pouring out the riches of His grace upon repentant sinners, covering our sin in the Blood of Christ. Whatever our heavenly Father has or does is done for our benefit, not His own. Come and receive the treasures of heaven which Christ has obtained for you and store up for yourself those things that will never pass away.

May we all by the merciful guiding of the Holy Spirit, strive to be faithful stewards. Let each of us go home and give deliberate thought to how we are using the unrighteous mammon that has been entrusted to us. Turn off the television and sit down as a family and talk about how each of you and your family as a whole can work to be better stewards of the Lord's riches. Evaluate how you spend your time and your money, asking and answering honestly, whether each thing serves to encourage you in the true faith and faithfulness in your vocations, or whether they are actually just self-serving and distract you from the eternal things. Give thanks to God for His rich bounty and plan together how you can better use the Lord's gifts for His good and gracious purposes, treasuring up the things that lead to eternal life and providing opportunities to share those things with your neighbor so that together you may rejoice in the heavenly places. Fill your homes with prayer, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (even if you think you can't sing). Read and

Many members. One body united in Christ.

study the Bible every day. Use your daily bread to care for those whom God gives you and those in need and tell them about Christ. Make sure that your church can spread the Gospel and meet the needs of our community. Make your salvation and the salvation of your children and your neighbors your chief priority because that alone endures forever. God grant it for Jesus' sake.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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