

Sermon for August 9, 2020

Luke 16:1- 9 (10-23)

As Jesus neared the end of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, he turned his attention from preaching to the people and the scribes and the Pharisees to teaching his disciples. He had just finished preaching and teaching the parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost Son whom we know as the Prodigal Son.

Somehow, we have come to a point in church life where we think of the word prodigal as meaning “lost.” Prodigal does not mean “lost.” A look up of the meaning of the word “prodigal” used as an adjective yields these results: “spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant.” And so it was that the prodigal son spent his inheritance freely. The same son who was lost to his father was also a spendthrift, a wasteful spender - profligate. But, now he had returned home. He was not lost any longer. But one of the main points in Jesus' teaching about the prodigal son was that he was wasting resources. After seeing how Jesus commanded his disciples to gather up the leftovers at the feeding of thousands and with the parable of the prodigal son, we see that Jesus was not wasteful of resources.

So Jesus turned to his disciples to speak another parable about a person who was wasting his master's resources. This man was a steward, a manager of his master's estate. And he had been wasting resources but his boss caught him and fired him. Not knowing where to go or what to do he used the remainder of his time as steward to curry favor with some of his master's debtors by cutting the amount they owed. Now, he did hasten the payment of the debts they owed and raised resources for his master quickly. But, his master was no fool. He realized what the dishonest steward was doing. And the master commended the steward for his wisdom in dealing with the things of this world. At the same time the steward had attempted by dishonesty to curry favor with those who

might favor him when he had no job. But the kicker to this whole story comes in verse nine.

Jesus says: “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into **eternal** dwellings. “ REPEAT. NOTICE how I emphasized **eternal dwellings**.

Remember, Jesus was speaking to his disciples. Probably the scribes and Pharisees are still listening along with some other people. Jesus says: “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into **eternal dwellings**. “ Is Jesus telling us to depend on our shrewdness in dealing with money and the things of this world so that when that shrewdness fails, our friends and cohorts can give us life in eternity? No! No! No! Jesus is being ironic – maybe even a little sarcastic – maybe even a little “tongue in cheek”. He is saying to his disciples. Think! Think! Think! Can anyone in this world give you eternal life? No! No! No! Only the true and living Triune God can give eternal life.

In the following verses, 10-13, which are included in our reading today only as an add-on – which is hard to understand - we hear Jesus really explain this parable (remember that a parable is an earthly story having a heavenly meaning) : **10** He who is faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. **11** Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*? **12** And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? **13** “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

In the words of Harold Buls, noted Lutheran author and theologian: “Both believers and unbelievers live for the future. The **unbelievers** live only for this life.

The **believer** always keeps his attention on eternal life. Jesus has already given the believer eternal life. But now the believer must live wisely and faithfully, always remembering that at the end the Lord will welcome him with the words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter the joy of your Lord.'" Mt. 25:21.

The unfaithful steward may have been wise to the ways of the world, but he worshipped a god, mammon on money, that could not give him eternal life. Only God can give eternal life. The summation of this sermon is very plain and very simple: You can not serve two gods. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or else you will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Be careful so that you serve the only true and living God, the God who can give you eternal life. Put your trust in Him only and always!

Amen