

21 November 2004
Last Sunday in the Church Year

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Who is it?”

Text: Luke 12:42-48

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

Robbery is something we take seriously. We expect the police to come and do something about it. But are you being robbed of something everyday? Something that is not material? Are you being robbed and not even know it?

In my sermon last week, I told you that as Christians we need not worry about Judgment Day. It doesn't have to be an ever-present concern for us because Jesus has taken care of that day, and God's judgment, for us. And since we know how that Day is going to turn out, we are now free to live. . . . Now that's not an excuse to say that it doesn't matter how we then live, or that our sin doesn't matter – it most certainly does! Our sin cost the Son of God His life on the cross. But it is to say that as Christians, because of Christ's death and resurrection, we live not in constant fear of our sin, but in the constant joy of forgiveness. And that as we live each day and each moment of our lives in Christ and His forgiveness, we are ready for Judgment Day, whenever it comes. That is the blessed freedom we have been given.

But are you living in this freedom? Its one thing to know the facts, but do these facts make a difference in your life? Are you living in the constant joy of Christ's love and forgiveness? Or is something **robbing you** of that joy, that confidence, and that freedom? . . . Now be clear about what I'm saying here. I'm not talking about being happy and carefree everyday. Christians have just as many ups and downs and struggles and challenges and good days and bad days as anyone else. Maybe even more! No, when I speak of joy, I don't mean an emotion or a feeling that comes and goes depending on how the day is going. This joy is born of faith, and lives in the confidence that no matter how I'm doing, there is a greater reality that defines me and my life. There is a foundation upon which my life and hope are built – a foundation that remains strong and steady and will never let me down, even though I may grow weak and waver. Even though I fall and fail, so often. I am safe. I am secure. I am forgiven. On this day, on Judgment Day, and everyday the same. This foundation is a constant in a world that is constantly changing.

And so the question I am asking you today is not *whether or not* you are living on this foundation, for you are! By virtue of your Baptism, Christ has put you in Himself as your foundation, and He is everyday the same. And in Him you are safe and secure and forgiven. *But are you living in this freedom that Christ provides for you?* Are you living in the constant joy of His love and forgiveness? Or is something (or someone!) **robbing you** of this? Of this joy and confidence and freedom that is yours?

Well, to answer that question, consider your reaction to the Holy Gospel that you heard read this morning. How did you think about those words? How did you react?

“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?” And then we heard of the master’s return, and the judgment that then took place.

Perhaps at this point, when you heard these words, you began looking at your life. And that’s good and proper – self-examination is not bad. For pastors too! Am I being faithful? Am I being the pastor or person God wants me to be? Am I a good father or mother? Am I careful in my thoughts, words, and deeds? Is God pleased with me and my life? Would He consider me a wise and faithful manager? . . . The answer, if we are honest and realistic, is no. You confessed that earlier, and when you confessed it, you spoke the truth. We are not what God would have us be. We could have done better. We *should* have done better. And the fates that await unfaithful managers – well, the choices are not good. That’s not a Judgment Day to look forward to!

And so at this point, we might resolve to do better. I could have done better. I *should* have done better. I am going to do better! And perhaps, let’s say for the sake of argument, you do! . . . It’s too late. Just as a football team that loses its first 8 games and then wins its last 8 games is still going to miss the playoffs, so you, even if you could be a faithful manager from now on – you still have your old record. Hanging like an albatross around your neck. Too little, too late. We still don’t measure up. . . . And so this reading that we heard, this Holy Gospel, sure doesn’t sound like Gospel! Thinking like this, it gives not joy and freedom, but despair and fear.

And that’s exactly what Satan wants! He wants to **rob you** of your joy and freedom, and he does that by getting you to forget about your foundation, and getting you to rely on yourself. To rely on your determination. To resolve to do better. Because he knows we can’t, and that we’ll just keep digging ourselves in deeper and deeper. ***Who is the faithful and wise manager?*** And he whispers in your ear, “*Not you!*” Not me.

But there is another way of looking at all of this, and to answer the question: *who is the faithful and wise manager?* For the question is still there! We might have said who it *isn't*, but who is? Satan wants us to stop at the *not me*, that he might drive us to despair and **rob us** of our joy and freedom and put us under the burdens of fear and Law and hopelessness. But the reason why Jesus spoke these words is that He wants us to know who is – and that He is. For the question that Jesus asks is not “*are you a faithful and wise manager?*” but “*who is the faithful and wise manager?*” You see, the question is singular because the answer is singular. **There is only one.** It wasn't Adam, he fell into sin. It wasn't Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, they were all unfaithful. It wasn't Moses, he doubted and disobeyed. It wasn't Saul, or David, or Solomon, they wandered in their pride and power. It wasn't the prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah, who trembled before God in fear. It wasn't Peter, James, John, or the other apostles, who ran away from Jesus and denied Him. It wasn't our church fathers like Athanasius or Luther. **There is only one.** Who took Satan's robbery seriously, and came to do something about it. The One born without sin. The One who lived a completely perfect life in all He said and did. The One who fully trusted in His Father. The One who remained faithful, even when hanging on a cross, being forsaken by His Father, and being punished for sins He didn't commit. Only one. And as a result, in His ascension, He has been placed “*over all the possessions of God*” – the whole Kingdom. And now He gives to us all that He has earned. He gives to us all the gifts of the Kingdom that have been given to Him.

And so while we are not the wise and faithful manager, we have a wise and faithful manager, who is giving us our food at the proper time. Our spiritual food. Speaking His Word to us, giving us His Body and Blood to eat. The wise and faithful manager who not only provides for us, but took our stripes and punishment for us, and who was cut in pieces for us, and assigned a place with the unfaithful for us. This wise and faithful manager is always giving to us, giving us faith and forgiveness, that we might live not under the burdens of doubt and fear, but in joy and freedom. So that living in that joy and freedom, we might begin living like Him, and giving like Him. Giving what has been given to us. And living always in dependence on our wise and faithful manager. Always returning to Him, always looking to Him, always knowing that He is here for us – forgiving when we so often fail and fall. Strong and steady when we are weak and wavering. Giving us all and exactly what we need at the proper time.

You see, Satan wants you to forget all of that, and try to manage yourself; and try to be strong yourself; and try to get it done yourself. He wants you to look anywhere but to Christ Jesus, so that he can starve you and run you to death, heaping burdens and expectations upon you, and thus **rob you** of your joy and freedom in Christ. And he often succeeds, doesn't he? He's had a lot of practice at it, and he knows the buttons to push and the lies to tell. He shows us the ways of the world and convinces us that it must

be the same way with God.

But to you, and to all people, Christ, the wise and faithful manager is calling. He is the living water to quench our thirsty souls. He is the bread of life to satisfy our hunger. He is the rest we so desperately need. And He is the living proof that it is not the same way with God. . . . That is the foundation we have been placed on. A foundation of joy and freedom, not worrying about the end or what the verdict on us will be, but living in confidence that Christ has provided for us all that we need. And that joy and confidence are yours as you stay focused on Him, and not on yourself. As you rely on Him, and not yourself. As you receive from Him all that He has for you. For that is why He came. That is why He is here for you. And that is why He is coming again. That you may have life, and have it abundantly. That you may have life, both here and forever. That you may rejoice that you have a wise and faithful manager. And He will not let you down!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.