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“Absurd and Crazy Love”

Text: Luke 16:1-15 (Amos 8:4-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-15)

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

Tragedies seem to bring out the best in people. When bad things happen, people want to help, people want to give, people open their hearts in compassion. The flooding in Colorado, the bombing in Boston, the tornado in Oklahoma, superstorm Sandy - just to name a few recent examples. Spontaneous memorials are erected to comfort, relief funds are started to aid, and people come from all over to roll up their sleeves and pitch in when normally they'd be home, sitting on their couches, watching TV or surfing the internet.

*How sad. . . .* Yes, how sad that it takes a tragedy, that it takes these extraordinary events to get us to do what we should be doing all along, all the time: loving our neighbor. Maybe that's why God causes, or allows - or however you want to say it - these things to happen. To get us out of ourselves and out of our shells to love our neighbor. To get us to serve. To get us to give.

And so it seems to me in the Holy Gospel we heard today. This is the next in a long list a parables Jesus is telling. Stories to help us realize and begin to understand God's love for us.

So there's this man, Jesus says, who is a manager, or a steward, for a very wealthy man. This is a great job, a privileged position, a job lots of people would like to have. Jesus doesn't give a lot of information about this man or his job except that one day, someone reported him to his master and brought charges against him: he was being unfaithful; he was wasting his master's possessions. This was a tragedy - a *personal* tragedy for this man, for he was losing his job. The master calls him in and says to him: ***You can no longer be manager. Come give an account of your management.***

And as any of us would do when summoned in this way . . . [Gulp!]

Perhaps the words that the prophet Amos spoke today could have been spoken to this man. Again, Jesus doesn't give us many details, but maybe this is what he was doing, what Amos accuses Israel of, back in the day: *trampling the needy, using false measures, taking advantage of people, eager only for gain however he could get it, and from whomever - whether they had little or much.* Sounds like a lot of people today as well. You know people like that. Maybe he or she even stares back at us in the mirror from time to time . . .

But whatever this man was doing, he wasn't going to do it much longer. Give an account. Your time is up.

So he begins giving. He is beset by tragedy but, by golly, he is going to use the time he has left! He begins slashing what is owed by his master's debtors. 100 becomes 50 for one, 100 becomes 80 for another. And you get the feeling he did this for everyone he could, all who owed his master.

*And for this he is commended! Well done!*

Now, if you're scratching your head over that, you're not alone! This parable has caused a lot of confusion over the years . . .

And so some, in trying to make sense of this, have surmised that what the manager slashed may have been his own profit and not his master's money. Over the years he would add to whatever was owed his master to pad his own pocket and that's what he's giving up here. *And that's possible*, that was a practice back then, though we're not told that, so . . . maybe not.

And if not, then what he was slashing was in fact owed to the master, and the master should have been angry with his manager even more! For he was giving away what was not his; decreasing the master's income; stealing from him in a way. And maybe that's what the manager was doing, trying to stick it to his master one last time before he had to turn over the books and leave. *Fire me, huh? I'll show you!*

If that's the scenario, it makes the master's response all the more non-sensical. For why would he *commend* the manager for doing this? But we're here thinking with worldly minds, and trying to make worldly sense of this parable. But if there's one thing to learn from Jesus and His life and His parables it is that **God and His love do not make worldly sense**. *That's the point*. God's love, mercy, and compassion is beyond our wildest imagination.

So let's think differently: *what if this is what the master wanted his manager to be doing all along?* To be kind, to be compassionate, to use the master's wealth to help and love and care for people? So when the manager does that - even though it took a tragedy to make him do it - the master is pleased.

And so it is for you and me. The wealth that has been entrusted to you is not "yours" - it is your Master's, your God's, given to you to use for a time. And looking at all of you, your Master is not only very wealthy, He is very generous. He has given you all so much! Some more and some less, but all of you have little or no need. And what pleases Him is when we are good and faithful stewards of all He has given us. Serving not ourselves or making our wealth our god that we love and cherish above all else, but serving Him with

it - serving Him by loving and caring for and helping our neighbors. Using our worldly wealth (or as Jesus said: our *unrighteous wealth*) as well as our spiritual wealth (our *true riches*) in that way.

And so not just in times of tragedy, but at all times using and giving what we have for others. Giving not just our worldly wealth, but also giving our hearts, our ears, our compassion, our time, our prayers, our forgiveness. *Lavishly* giving - not holding grudges, not being too busy for others, not looking at them with suspicious eyes, not withholding our love - but serving them as if they were God Himself.

*Think about that!* Would that change how you do things? If that person in need were God Himself? For as Jesus said: “*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me*” (Matthew 25:40).

The Pharisees ridiculed Jesus for this. Maybe you and I will be too. So be it. They are not really ridiculing us, but God. For this is what He did for us. He is *always* a giving God, a loving and serving and compassionate God. And in response to the tragedy of sin and death, His response was to give even more. To give his Son to rescue us. And so: Jesus. As we confess: *conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. And then the third day He rose again from the dead.*

And with that, all that we need was provided. The debt of sin paid, the power of the enemy broken, forgiveness won. Which now, in Word and Sacrament, is lavished upon you. Sinful you, broken you, confused you, unfaithful you. Now holy you, healed you, forgiven you, faithful you. Spiritual gifts. *The gifts Christ freely gives* (LSB #602). That you be what you are not. That you be raised from the death of sin to a new life in Christ.

Is that foolish? No, it’s love. The absurd, incredible love of God for you.

For as St. Paul said in his letter to Timothy: *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved* - all people, even you! - *and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. And sometimes it takes a tragedy to do that. It takes taking away our false gods before we’ll turn to the true God, before we’ll open our hearts and give what we have been given. And so receive God’s commendation: *well done!*

*This is good*, Paul says. To pray for people, to love them and care for them. Which really seems rather obvious doesn’t it? Did we really need Paul to tell us *this is good*?

Unless . . . unless “good” doesn’t just mean “not bad,” but *more* than that. Like “good” as in *God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was good, very good* (Gen 1:31). “Good” as in before sin. “Good” as in Jesus *the Good Samaritan*. “Good” as in Jesus *the Good Shepherd*. “Good” as in *no one is good except God alone* (Mark 10:18). To be good in

that way is to be of God, is to be god-like, is to be of the Gospel. To be so toward others not because they deserve it, but because of the Gospel given to us. The Gospel which changes us and works in us. Because of Christ living in you and working through you for others. Family, friends, neighbors, strangers. All people everywhere. Good works are Gospel works.

That it sometimes takes a tragedy to get us to do that, what we should be doing all along is sad. But we have a Saviour who turns tragedies into blessings. From the cross He bore to the cross in your life. The cross, that dying and rising for you, you may also die and rise with Jesus to a new life, a good life, a Gospel life. Which is the ultimate gift. A gift that begins now and has no end.

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