

18 September 2016
Pentecost 18

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Sons and Faithful Stewards”

Text: Luke 16:1-15

[*Note: The sermon today is a bit shorter than usual as the Narrative Divine Service that we are using today is a bit longer than usual. :-)*]

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

The manager wasn't just losing his job - he was losing his life. This wasn't just what he did, it was who he was. He was being cast out. And out is a scary and deadly place to be.

He who has ears to hear may notice here an echo of what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden. They misused what had been given them. They wasted Paradise. In wanting and reaching for more, they lost everything. God called them to account and they were *cast out* of the Garden - a scary and deadly place to be.

And then there is the parable Jesus told immediately before this one: the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The story of the son who took what his father gave him and wasted it all. He wasn't cast out - he more cast himself out, and found himself in that scary and deadly place.

It's easy to hear what all three of those stories have in common - the wasting of what belongs to our master; what has been given us to manage, or steward. The wasting by trying to enrich ourselves, by keeping for ourselves, by reaching for more and getting less. And even less than less. In the end, *cast out*.

But what of the master? Our Father? What does He do in each of these cases? The casting out is not the last word from him - not yet. He has more for us. More *to give*.

He gives the manager in today's parable His *commendation*. For the manager began to no longer keep, no longer take, but give. And by giving helped not only those in debt, but himself as well. By enriching them he was also enriching himself.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father gives his son his sonship back. For the son who was dead to him was alive again; he was lost but now found.

And so too were Adam and Eve given something. Their Father covered their nakedness

with the skin of an animal. A sacrificial victim shed its blood to cover their shame. And with that victim, a promise, too, was given - of a child, a son, who would be the good and faithful steward Adam failed to be. Who would perfectly carry out the will of the Lord and atone for those who do not.

And that one was the one telling this parable. **Jesus**. And what did He do that was the will of His Father? He gave. He gave His life for the life of the world. He took the bill that each one of us owes and didn't just reduce it, but cancelled it. ***How much do you owe?*** He asks? Sit down and write zero. Nothing. I have paid it all. Every last bit. I forgive you all your sins, all your mismanagement, all your wasting. And with that, your management and sonship is restored and your shame is covered. The victim shed His blood for you on the cross, and you are no longer cast out. You are alive again.

And the Father is well pleased.

So if you would be rich, give.

When we keep for ourselves, we make ourselves poorer, not richer. When we keep for ourselves, we are wasting our possessions. When we keep for ourselves, we are not being stewards, but hoarders. And that includes not just physical things, but spiritual things too. We can be hoarders of forgiveness, too. Wanting it for ourselves and reluctant to give it to others. And on the day of judgment, what we have will be taken away from us. You can no longer be my steward. And then casting out. And out is a scary and deadly place to be.

But in giving, we make ourselves richer, not poorer. In giving, we are using our possessions as our Father would have us use them. In giving, we are being good and faithful stewards. For our Lord doesn't want us to enrich Him (as if we could!) - He wants to enrich us, and other through us. And then on the day of judgment, we will receive even more. Not because we have done so well and have earned something from God. But because you have done so in faith, relying on the goodness and promises of the one who gives and never runs out. That you cannot out-give Him. That He always has more for you and will provide for you. And thus, by faith, living in His giving-likeness.

You cannot serve two masters, Jesus said. ***You cannot serve God and money***, He said to the Pharisee who were lovers of money. ***You will hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other***. Your heart only has room for one God, one Lord, one Father.

And we need this warning, for the truth is, there are many things that capture our hearts, isn't there? Many things that we fear, love, and trust more than our Father who art in heaven. So repent. Confess and hide no more like Adam and Eve. Turn from your ways like the manager. Return like the Prodigal Son. And receive the commendation and

forgiveness your Father has to give to you. That He wants to give to you more than anything else.

For more than anything else He is a giving God. Who gives you life and new life. Who gives you the washing of His Son's Blood and the feeding of His Body and Blood. Who gives love to the loveless, righteousness to the unrighteous, and the promise of eternity to us who live in a world that is passing away. And when we cling to what is passing away, we pass away with it. But when we cling to what is eternal - our God and His eternal promises for us in Christ - then eternity is ours as well. The gift of our giving God.

And thus having what will not pass away, *the gifts Christ freely gives* (LSB #602) are ours to give as well. And when we lavishly and abundantly give away what is God's and what He has given us, we not only enrich others, we enrich ourselves. We are sons and faithful stewards. And He is well pleased.

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.