

22 September 2019  
Pentecost 15

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Zero”

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.

In the parable we heard today, a manager is accused of wasting, squandering, his master's possessions. He's about to be fired, maybe also thrown into prison. Yet, for some reason, he still has the books. So he starts giving his master's stuff away. 50 measures of oil, 20 measure of wheat, and maybe more, suddenly off the books. Like they weren't even there. He's making friends so that when he's fired or imprisoned, he'll at least have folks to take care of him and visit him. That makes sense. He's shrewd. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.

But then, when the master finds out what he's been up to, instead of blowing his top and going postal on his manager for giving his stuff away, *he commends him! Atta boy! Good job! Well done.* But maybe we can even make sense of this - for if these accounts were in collections, at least get something. Something is better than nothing. Like a clearance sale at a store. Slash the prices and at least get something. And if the customer gets something good for cheap, maybe they'll go back again. Shrewd.

The world gets that, Jesus says. **The church is the problem.** You see, it was the churchy Pharisees were accusing Jesus of mismanaging God's kingdom. Last week, they thought Jesus was not hallowing God's Name by hanging out with sinners and tax collectors. Today, they think He is wasting God's stuff by just giving it away. Giving salvation to people who don't deserve it. Because these tax collectors and sinners, they owe a huge debt to God, and they should pay it. They should change, clean themselves up, or get what's coming to them.

Maybe the Pharisees had verses - like the ones we heard today from Amos - in mind. Where the Lord swears: *I will never forget any of their deeds.* And Amos tells us what those deeds were at that time. The people couldn't wait for church to be over so they could get back to what they really wanted to do, and what they really wanted to do was what they were thinking about during church anyway. They took advantage of those in need to enrich themselves. They *made the ephah small and the shekel great* - which means giving less and charging more for it. They used scales that were rigged - tipped toward their own advantage. God was not pleased with His people, and He wasn't going to forget.

But it seems as if Jesus didn't learn that Word of God! Otherwise He wouldn't just be giving away God's mercy and love and forgiveness. *God doesn't forget, Jesus.* Maybe you should remember that and change your ways.

And what about you? Do you think God just forgets your sins? You don't forget, do you? The sins of others against you. When they gossiped about you, or hurt you. When they betrayed you or took what you had coming to you. Make 'em pay what they owe. And as a church do we do this too? I mean, the really bad sinners, are they welcome here? Respectable sinners (like us!), okay. But the really bad ones? Don't they have to clean themselves up first? At least a little? Do *something*? We don't want others thinking we're *that* kind of church, do we? And so are we stingy with God's mercy and love and forgiveness?

If we do that, remember that word from Amos: ***I will not forget their deeds.*** Not their deeds (out there) - your deeds, and mine.

You see, the world knows how to handle its wealth, but the church not so much. Because what the manager did in this parable - **yes!** That's exactly what we're supposed to do. And even more. For what Jesus was doing, and what frosted the Pharisees so much, was that He was running around and taking the bills of all these tax collectors and sinners, and not just cutting them in half - but tearing them up completely. Writing zero on them! Forgiving them. Paid in full. And not only that, Jesus now has the audacity to tell this parable so that the Pharisees know that not only is this what He is doing, **but that the Father commends Him for it!** That every time a sinner, a tax collector, a prostitute, a thief, a murderer, an adulterer, or any other kind of criminal is forgiven, Jesus gets an *atta boy!* *Good job! Well done.* This is exactly what His Father wants.

But . . . what about that verse in Amos? Well, yes, quite right. Jesus learned that verse. The Lord does not forget any sin, not even one. **And that's good news.** For if the Lord forgot you sin, how do you know He won't find it or remember it later? Like the bill on your desk that gets lost under a pile of papers, only to be uncovered later. You still owe what it says, and its worse now, because now you have all kinds of interest and late fees and your credit score has taken a hit. What if you sin were like that? Forgotten now, only to come back again on the Last Day?

So no, the Lord does not forget your sins, not even one. **Instead He deals with them.** All of them. Every single one. Jesus takes your debt, every single thing you owe, to the cross and pays for it. With His blood. So your debt, your sin, isn't forgotten - **it's atoned for,** washed away. All that you owe died with Him. So now, when you are baptized, Jesus takes your bill of sin and writes on it: Zero. Forgiven. Paid in full. And since He doesn't forget *any* sin, you can be sure that *every* sin is paid for. The resurrection proves that. There was no sin left that could hold Jesus in the grave.

The Pharisees didn't like that very much, and there are still people today who don't like

that very much - maybe even you. When you get hurt. When you get cheated. When you get taken advantage of. Forgiveness can't be that easy. Somebody's gotta pay.

But who said forgiveness is easy? And who says somebody didn't pay? When you feel that way or think that way take another look at the cross and what Jesus did there for you and your sin and every sin. At what the *Son of God* did there for you and your sin and every sin. It wasn't easy. But that's how God is. And that's His love for you. And for all people. Even those who sin against you.

That's why Paul tells Timothy, as we heard today, to pray for all people, for God *desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. This truth. Of our Saviour who has cancelled every debt. *For*, Paul goes on to say, *there is one God*, - one master - *and there is one mediator* - one manager - *between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom* - a payment - *for all . . . For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle* - to preach this good news of cancelled debts - . . . *a teacher of the Gentiles* - of the sinners and tax collectors, the outsiders, the not-good-enoughs - *in faith and truth* - that this good news is even for them. No, *especially* for them! And if for them, then *for you*.

So come with the debt you have accumulated this week - how you have put yourself and your desires before God, how you have dishonored His Name and ignored His Word and failed in your prayers, how you have rebelled against authority, hurt others by your words and deeds, lusted after what wasn't yours, stolen, cheated, lied, gossiped, coveted, were angry at God for what He did or didn't do for you - bring it *all*, that whole bill, you poor, miserable sinner, and hear how the manager, your brother Jesus, takes it and writes on it ZERO. I forgive you all your sins. And then come take your place at His Table, where Jesus is still coming for sinners like us, and giving you His risen Body and Blood - the Body and Blood that paid for you - and the forgiveness, life, and salvation He won for you with it.

And then when you leave this place is just a few moments, what about those who owe you or who wronged you this week? Will you demand payment from them? Or will you take their bill and write ZERO. Forgiven. Cover their sin and debt with the same blood, the same mercy, the same forgiveness that covered your sin and debt. And if we do that with forgiveness, how much more with our stuff. Don't hold onto it. Is it really worth that much anyway? You cannot serve God and money. Give it away. It's only stuff. God will give you more.

And while the world might think that crazy, like the Pharisees thought Jesus crazy, the Father says to you: *Atta boy! Good job! Well done.*

And who knows . . . it just might be that those folks you forgave might welcome you to your seat at the Table in the eternal dwellings. The same ZERO written in blood on their bill, too. Wouldn't that be cool?

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.