

18 September 2022  
Pentecost 15

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Be Like the World? Yes! Only Better”  
Text: Luke 16:1-15; 1 Timothy 2:1-15

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

Desperate times call for desperate measures. When time is short, your priorities change. What you would have put off, you no longer do. What you thought could wait no longer can. What wasn't so important to you suddenly now is. You know you should have fixed your sump pump and now your basement is flooding. You know you should have stopped at the gas station and now you're out of gas. You know you should have started that assignment earlier . . . now you're just hoping to get something, *anything*, done to hand in or present. It can be more serious than that, though. Like when it comes to matters of your physical health, life and death stuff. That test, that procedure you know you should have had. But most of all, really, though I don't think we often think like this, is when it comes to matters of your spiritual health. *Spiritual* life and death stuff.

So when the manager in the parable today heard these words, ***Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager***, his life changed in a heartbeat. Desperation set in. What he thought was so important suddenly wasn't any longer. Charges had been made against him that he was wasting his master's possessions. And the word for ***wasting*** there is the same word Jesus had used in the parable He told right before this one, the *Parable of the Lost Son*, sometimes called the *Prodigal Son*. This situation is even worse, though, for that younger son was wasting his own possessions, but the manager was wasting his master's. But for both, desperation made them change. The Lost Son went home. The manager now did what he could to take care of his future.

So since he was not strong enough for manual labor and was too proud to beg, he starts slashing the accounts of those who owe his master. Whatever time he has left, he's going to use to his advantage and make friends who can help him. Now some scholars think the manager had been padding the books to enrich himself and that's what he was slashing. Or maybe he was just manipulating the accounts in other ways. But either way, the end result was the same: friends. Friends who, he hoped, would take care of him the same way.

But I think it must have been quite a surprise to him when not just those who owed his master, but the master himself speaks well of him! When the master, who not long before

this had believed the accusations made against him and fired him, now *commends* him! For what he did was very shrewd, or prudent or practical or wise. And the world is like that. The world knows the world's ways. How to get along. How to get ahead. How to use the system to get what you want. We do it, too. Maybe some do it more than others, maybe some play the game better than others, but we all know the game.

So Jesus' question for us today is this: *how come you're not like this spiritually?*

For the day is coming when the Master of all, the Lord of all, is going to call us to account. Charges of sin brought against us. For wasting the gifts given to us. The gifts of life and health and wealth and faith and all that our Lord has so abundantly blessed us with . . . and what have you done with it? Have you loved the Giver with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Have you loved your neighbor? Or have you loved *you*? Have you loved being at ease? Have you loved having a big bank account? Have you loved sinning and not really been too concerned with your spiritual health and wealth? The Scriptures in your home gathering dust. Prayers left unsaid. Your baptism a distant and oft forgotten memory. The new day gifted to you each morning taken for granted? Your husband, wife, children, parents, friends, left to fend for themselves? Your wants, your desires, your pleasures, your hopes, your dreams all that matter?

And then what happens when you are called to account for all this?

Now, in the parable, it might have sounded a bit funny that the manager who was fired still had time to cook the books - why would the master do that? Well, it's not meant to be a true story, but to teach us something about *our* situation. And that your day of reckoning is coming. And maybe sooner than you think. So how should you be living? If you knew that day was coming for you tomorrow, or next week, or even next year, would that change how you live today? I think it would. When time is short, priorities change. When time is short, we start doing those things we should have been doing all along. If there's still time.

We don't know what happened to this manager after this. Were his efforts successful? Was he taken care of? Was the master so impressed with his shrewdness that he kept him on? Or did it all not work, and the manager left to live out his days lonely and broke? We don't know. **But what we do know** is that's not how our heavenly Father wants us to live - in uncertainty about our future, if we'll have enough time to change. I can tell you right now with absolute certainty that if it were up to us, if it were on us, we don't have enough time and our future is not a bright one.

So how good, then, that there is someone who took our debt to our heavenly Father, and didn't cut it by a half or three-quarters - though that would have been generous enough! But still not enough. So the faithful one, the one who came and did exactly and perfectly what His Father wanted, 100%, took our debt and paid it for us. 100%! And He didn't

dishonestly just cancel it - **He paid it**, with His death on the cross. And when that debt was paid, Jesus said *tetelestai*, which means, *it is finished* (John 19:30). But did you know that's the exact same word that was used in those days to write on the accounts when a debt was fully paid off? *Tetelestai*. The debt is finished. Paid in full. Written on your account with the blood of Jesus, the Son of God. No matter how enormous your debt, or the debts of all in the world, the death of God's Son and our brother, Jesus, more than enough to pay it all. You are free.

You heard it again this morning in the absolution. And you'll receive it again in the communion of Jesus' Body and Blood. Because our heavenly Father doesn't want us to live in fear or uncertainty and thus selfishly concerned about our salvation. No! He wants us to live in joy and confidence in Him and His love, that our future is secure, and thus be able to live for and be concerned about our neighbor.

You see, the manager who slashed the debts owed to his master did so hoping to make friends who would take of him. But when **Jesus** paid our debt in full, while He did so to make us His friends, He did not do so in the hopes that we would take care of Him. He doesn't need anything from us! So, He said, if you're grateful to Me for what I did - and why wouldn't we be! - take care of your neighbor. Use all that I've given you in this world to make friends - and not just for this physical world and life - but who will welcome you into the eternal dwellings. So that they'll be there, too. Help *them* be there, too. For the time is short. Maybe shorter than we know.

So you've been richly and lavishly forgiven - *forgive others!* Stop selfishly holding onto grudges and bitterness and anger. Their debts *tetelestai*. Finished. Paid in full. You've been blessed in baptism to be a child of God - *so pray!* Pray, as Paul told Timothy and his churches, that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. For that's what your Father desires and wants than anything else. That they know their debts are *tetelestai*. Finished. Paid in full. *And what else?* What else have you been given in this unrighteous world and life - that is passing away and isn't going to last - that you can use to help your neighbor? And especially for them to be with us in the next, righteous world and life that is eternal. Desperate times call for desperate measures. And while you aren't desperate, they might be. And the time is short. Maybe shorter than we think. Maybe it's time to change how we live . . . *for their sake?* To love as we have been loved? That *our* confidence and joy may be *other's*, too? That when they Last Day comes, they, with us, will NOT hear the voice of a master calling us to account, but the voice of the Father welcoming home His sons and daughters, into eternal dwellings. That's what Jesus has done for us. And so how we get to live now. Shrewdly. Wisely. Faithfully. Freely. Like the free son and daughters we are.

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.