

## Ninth Sunday after Trinity, August 14, 2022

**Readings:** 2 Samuel 22: 26-34, 1 Corinthians 10: 6-13, Luke 16: 1-13

### The Steward's Shrewdness Sanctified

*"The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness"* (Luke 16:1–9). The steward's shrewdness is praiseworthy for two reasons. First, he knew the master would be merciful. He trusted that the master would honor the debts he forgave in the master's name. In the same way, though we have squandered our heavenly Father's possessions in selfishness and sin, Jesus is the Steward who has canceled our debt, knowing that His forgiveness will be honored by the Father because of the holy cross. Secondly, the steward was shrewd in using oil and wheat to provide for his earthly welfare. So also do these earthly elements aid us when pressed into heavenly use in the anointing of baptism and the wheat of the Lord's Supper. Those who have the Sacraments will have an eternal home when their earthly home fails. These provide us aid in times of temptation (1 Cor. 10:6–13). For the Lord is our strength and a shield to all who trust in Him (2 Sam. 22:26–34).

### Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have some very interesting passages that we're going to try and unpack today. The dishonest steward is a very interesting one. This is a parable, and one of the things that we need to remember about all parables is, it's not about us. The lesson that we are to learn is not about what we are supposed to do or how we're supposed to live. All parables, except for maybe one or two, have as their goal of teaching to teach us about the kingdom of God. Now, this one isn't labeled as a parable. Jesus doesn't say, "The kingdom of God is like this," as He does in many of the parables, but it has that same essence of a parable, a teaching story. So we need to understand what it signifies and what we are to learn about God in the process. Because if we don't figure out that, then we're just going to get the wrong idea. This is not God saying, "It's okay to be dishonest as long as it's for a good purpose." That's not what God is saying here. So, we'll just get that out of your mind. But first, before we get into the dishonest steward or manager, we need to look at 2 Samuel, and how it starts out. "With the merciful you show yourself merciful. With the blameless man, you show yourself blameless." Now I'd like to think that that offers me a lot of comfort, but when I'm honest with myself, am I merciful the way I ought to be? I don't think so. I get pretty mad at dumb people. I'm not very merciful. I mean, it's just the way it is. And with a blameless man, you show yourself blameless. Yeah, no, that doesn't apply to me, either. So what in the world? What hope do I have if God is saying He's going to be merciful only if I'm merciful, and I'll be considered blameless only if I act blameless? Where is my hope? What am I to do with it? I'm lost.

And then 1 Corinthians has all these examples from the Old Testament, and all these examples are from God's chosen people when they're in the wilderness. I mean, one of them, like the first one, idolaters, they sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. That was immediately after God did all of His miracles in Egypt and brought them through the Red Sea and brought them to the base of Mount Sinai. And what did they do? They started to idol worship. And the one about the sexual morality, they were right at the gates of the Promised Land. They were almost there and they got invited to participate in the fertility rights of the Moabites. And

they said, "Oh, yeah, that sounds like a good idea," and they went off with them. I mean, these are supposed to be the people of God. And yet here they are. It's a whole laundry list of how they were destroyed in the wilderness because they were not merciful and they were not blameless. So, wherein lies our hope?

Go back to the steward, the dishonest manager. He's been caught cooking the books? Skimming off the top? We don't really know and it doesn't really matter what was going on. Either way he did not treat the books the way he should have. And the master found out. Now the interesting thing is, if I were the master, I would walk with my manager to the books and grab them from his hands before he had a chance to change them even further. I wouldn't give him the opportunity to try and mess with them anymore. And yet this master says, "Go and get the books and bring them back to me." Already we're beginning to see a little bit about the picture of the nature of the master. He's generous. He really is looking for every opportunity to be generous. He doesn't even require the servant to give the books right away. And so what does the servant do? He takes stock of his situation. He goes, "Okay." First off, he goes with, "What can I do?" And he looks at himself and he says, "Well, I'm too weak to dig and I'm too ashamed to beg." So he comes up with the realization, there is nothing that he can do to save himself.

And then we go back to Jeremiah. If you're merciful, he'll show mercy. If you're blameless, he'll treat you as blameless. And we all look at ourselves and go, "Well, that doesn't apply to me. There is nothing I can do." So what does the manager decide? "I know what I'm going to do." And he goes and he cooks the books even more, but he goes to the ones who owe the master, and he cancels half of their debt or a huge portion of their debt. Why in the world does he think this is going to work? I mean, it's further proof that he's done wrong. Why does he not think the master's going to come down hard on him and just ignore what he did? Because this steward, this manager, understands the nature of his master. He understands that his master desires to be generous. It might not have even been outside of the realm of normal behavior for the owners to get their debts canceled or portions of it taken away, because this master is generous and kind. Wants to be praised, wants to be loved in the assemblies. Wants people to honor him. And the steward understands this. The manager understands this about the master. So he is able to act the way he does because he knows his master is generous. And he knows his master's not going to go to the one with the oil or the one with wheat and say, "You know what? My steward didn't know what he was talking about. You owe the full amount." No. He knew his master would say, "Okay, that's fine. I forgive that," because the master is generous and loving. He gives freely. So the parable is not about the dishonest steward. It's about what the steward understands about the master.

You see, it says, "For the sons of the world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." See, they use their wealth to gain prestige and power and influence. They use it to gain what they desire. But we, as sons of light, are called to use unrighteous wealth, not for glory and praise of ourselves, not for our own power and right, but we are to use our unrighteous wealth generously, giving freely so that we might celebrate the joy of the generosity of our master. Because think about this, when you think about the cares and worries of this world, when you think about the problems that keep you up at night, how many of them are related to money? How many of the worries and concerns that we have in this world are related to our finances? Are related to the whims of the stock market, or the whims of our politicians, and the taxes and the inflation and all the other junk that's going on?

And yet what does Scripture say? "If I have clothing and food, it is enough." Well, how many of you have clothing and food and more? Abundantly more than all of that. See, God has already proven Himself to be

generous and abundantly blessing all of us. We have more than we need. God has been generous. Even with unrighteous wealth, God has been generous. How much more so can we count upon His generosity in our spiritual life? See, we're not merciful, we're not blameless, but look at the next verse. Verse 27 of 2 Samuel. "With the purified, you deal purely." Well, how do we become purified? Not by our own actions. We, like the steward, make an evaluation of our efforts and we say, "Well, I can't do that. Can't do that. I can't earn my salvation. I don't have anything I can do. I know what I do. I will trust in the generosity of my God. He has saved me. He has paid for my sins. He has adopted me in baptism and therefore I am his child. I look to my salvation and my hope in the generosity of my Lord and master. I recognize I am a humble person because I realize there is nothing I bring to this equation, except my sin and my faults and my failures and my worries." And God brings His generosity, His grace and His mercy and His love. And so I hold fast to Him and His Word because He purifies me. He causes me to be humble. He is a lamp that I might see in the darkness of this world. He gives me the strength to stand firm in the midst of trials and tribulations, because He has promised that He will not give me anything more than I can handle with Him in my life.

See, it's not that, "Well, with Christ, I'm stronger as an individual and I can resist the temptations of God." No. It's that God's Word, as it says again in 2 Samuel, "This God, His way is perfect. The Word of the Lord proves true. He is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him." See, I can resist the temptations of this world not by my own strength, but because I have a shield that guards me and protects me, and that shield is the Word of God which is faithful and accomplishes what He desires. And that is my salvation and my peace and my joy. And I find it all not in my abilities or not in what I've done, but I find all of that in Christ, that He has given to me. He is my rock upon which I can stand. A strong refuge. He has made my way blameless. Notice He doesn't say, "My way is blameless." He says, "He has made my way blameless," because it is Christ that lives, not me. He is doing the blamelessness in my life and I hold fast to Him and His promises.

So what are we called to do? We're called to consider all things in this world as forfeit, to trust in God above all things, to not worry that we have enough wealth or enough of whatever we need, because God is gracious. Now, this is not to say, don't bother working and don't be wise with your money, because He has given us all work to do. In fact, He has said, "If you do not work, you should not eat." He clearly has given us this opportunity to grow and to serve and to earn money. But to think of that as His gift to me, my vocation, my calling, my abilities, my skills, are all gifts that He has given to me and I use them not for my gain, but for His glory and for the service of others. So if I know that God is providing all this, I don't need to worry or fret, because I know God's Word is true and He will provide all that I need. He will support me in what I need in this life, because He already has, and He promises to continue, because His Word is true.

Money in and of itself is not evil, but the love of money is the root of all evil, because we put our trust too strongly in what it can do. But the fact of matter is, it can do very little. Only God's Word can save. Only God's Word can give us true peace. Only God's Word can give us joy in the midst of trials and tribulations. After all, what does He say? "In this world, you will have tribulations. But take heart. I have overcome the world." Seems pretty total. "I have overcome the world." What is there left? If I'm not even to be afraid of anything that happens in this world, if He promises that even in death I will be His, what is there to be afraid of? What is there to worry about? We are called to walk in faith, trusting that He has placed us on the rock, that He has purified us, that He has made us righteous and holy. That He is our strength and our shield. And come what may, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We will not be tempted

beyond our ability because He is with us and He provides us a way of escape through His Word, that we might be able to endure it to the end, where we might see the crown of glory and receive the gift of eternal life.

What does He say here in Luke? "I tell you, make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." See, what God's talking about is, is use His gifts that He has given you for His honor and His glory and for the good of others, because you trust Him. And by trusting Him, therein will you receive the eternal dwellings. Therein is your riches and your wealth. True wealth is in Christ, and His love, His generosity, is beyond what you could possibly even imagine. He will provide. In fact, He already has. Do you think He's waiting for you to say, "God, I need help," before He's going to help? He already knows. He just wants you to know where your help is coming from so that you might put your confidence in the right thing. His Word, His salvation, His comfort, His forgiveness, and His peace, which is free to you because He is generous beyond measure.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace and His generous abounding love be and abide with you always, now and forever more, unto life everlasting. Amen.