

Luke 16:1–9 [10–13] (Trinity IX)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
August 14, 2022

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

In the historic readings appointed for the church year, today's Gospel text is about the closest thing you can get to "stewardship Sunday." Maybe you've been to churches with an annual stewardship Sunday. It often takes place right before the new fiscal year begins or as a building project gets underway. The message of a stewardship Sunday usually involves talk about "time, talents, and treasures," with an implicit focus on treasures. At some churches, stewardship Sunday even involves processing up to the altar, just like you would go up for the Lord's Supper, and placing a pledge card in a box. It can be an awkward thing to talk about finances in the church, and oftentimes the church doesn't make it any easier. Stewardship Sunday in many churches begins to look a lot like pledge week for public television, a borderline desperate attempt to drum up some more cash to meet the budget. But there's also no way around it. The Church has to address financial matters because Jesus, and the entire Bible for that matter, have plenty to say about money and its godly use.

The lesson of our Gospel reading this morning is stated by Jesus in Luke 16:9: "And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings." That's the message of stewardship Sunday. The earthly goods God has given you can have an eternal impact. The unrighteous wealth of this life is connected to the eternal dwellings of heaven. When Jesus calls wealth "unrighteous," He means that all our material blessings on this side of Heaven are tainted with sin. Money is dirty. Not just the bills in your wallet and the Euro coins you find on the street, but all our financial resources

are tainted by sin because we are tainted by sin. The days are evil, but we can redeem the time. Our wealth is unrighteous, but we can still use our unrighteous wealth for righteous purposes.

That's called stewardship, which is using the gifts God has given us to build up His Kingdom. Stewardship is not about legalistically giving 10% of your income to the church or fundraising for a new building project, or even about supporting missionaries. No, Christian stewardship is about recognizing all physical and spiritual benefits as gifts from God. God has made you and given you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses, and He still takes care of them. God gives you clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all you have. He richly and daily provides you with all that you need to support this body and life. He defends you against all danger and guards and protects you from all evil. God is the master of the house, the creator and preserver of all things, in the world and in your life. We are simply managers, stewards of the good gifts God has given to us.

When you hear the parable of the dishonest manager, at first you might be confused about the morality of what's going on. Is Scripture condoning unethical business practices? Is the dishonest manager being praised for stealing? The answer, of course, is no. The parable of the dishonest manager should actually make you smirk a little bit. The dishonest steward is praised not because of his dishonesty, but because of his shrewdness. To be shrewd is to be clever or resourceful. The steward is clever in his dealings with old customers, knowing that pretty soon he'll be out of a job. The steward only has a little time left working under this rich man, so he redeems that time and uses it to make friends who can help him when he's out of work. The manager gives deep discounts to those who owe much. And the rich man can't help but be impressed by his manager's wit, even though it's the rich man who in the end will miss out on

the profit. There's just something satisfying about seeing someone act in such a clever way, even if that wit could have been put to much better use in an honorable way before the steward got himself into such trouble.

Jesus says: "The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light." Worldly-minded people often show great skill in their personal interactions. Politicians, businessmen, high-ranking officers, rulers, and the wealthy in this life oftentimes understand better than most the practical wisdom about "how to make friends and influence people." They know that a secure earthly future depends on how you treat people today. Successful people float to the top and stay there because they have learned how to pay attention to people, how to listen, and how to make others feel important.

But Jesus did not come to make friends and influence people. The point of this parable is not to teach you lessons you can find in any self-help book or leadership development course. No, the point of this parable is that God wants you to seek eternal goods with the same eagerness and resourcefulness as you see the children of this world seeking after temporal goods. If even the unbelievers can use their resources wisely to achieve their ends, how much more can we Christians, who have an eternal reward awaiting us? The shrewd manager used his wits so that he would have somewhere to live after he was fired for his mismanagement. His focus was on his earthly future. But Jesus wants us to focus on the eternal dwellings, our life in the world to come, our heavenly future. Jesus is saying to manage the gifts God has given you in this life with a view to life eternal.

We see a concrete example of this in 2 Corinthians 8, where Paul speaks about the generosity of the Macedonians. Though they were afflicted and poor, the Macedonian Christians still gave generously beyond their means. They begged to take part in the relief of the saints.

Paul says that “they gave themselves first to the Lord” and then to their fellow Christians. That is, they sought first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the other things of this life were added to them (Matt 6:33). The Macedonians focused on the eternal dwellings, their life in the world to come. They managed the gifts God gave them in this life with a view to life eternal.

Paul uses the example of the Macedonians and the example of Christ to encourage the Corinthians to put their money where their mouth is, or to put their treasure where their heart is. Paul writes: “I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:8–9). Paul is not commanding the Corinthians to give more money. He’s saying: “remember who you are in Christ Jesus.” Our Lord Jesus Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of sinful men (Phil 2:6–7). Jesus looked to the interests of others and that’s exactly what those of us in Christ do, too.

In Baptism we are given the mind of Christ, and so we count others more significant than ourselves. God became poor so that we could become rich. We too become poor so that others can become rich, that is, we use our earthly wealth to make friends who will receive us in the eternal dwellings. We use our financial resources in this life to bring others to Christ and the eternal life that is found in Him alone. We use our financial resources and everything God gives us in this life to clear the path for others to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s what Christian stewardship is all about: recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God and then using those gifts to promote God’s Kingdom.

What we do here in time affects eternity. Jesus, the King, will say to us: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” When did the righteous do those things for Jesus? Jesus says: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” Those we serve with the gifts God has given us will receive us into the eternal dwellings because it is Jesus whom we serve. Our unrighteous wealth put to use in these evil days has an effect for all eternity. Your temporal goods given to you by God will reap an eternal reward.

This does not mean that you are saved because of your good works. No, you know from the Scriptures that you are saved by grace alone through faith alone. You trust in the death of Jesus Christ our Lord on your behalf. You are declared righteous in God’s eyes when you believe you are accounted righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ. But faith is never alone. Good works always follow. Good works supply the proof that faith is living. How you use your money and all the other gifts God has given you in this life are evidence of the faith God has worked in you. How you use your unrighteous wealth reflects your faith, your trust in God and His providential care for you. You love because God first loved you. You give because God first gave to you, by becoming man and giving His life over for your sake.

So act wisely, dear Christian. Don’t squander what God has given you, but, so far as you are able, use the gifts God has given you in this life in such a way that others will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. God is the master. We are but

stewards. The end of all things is at hand. Our work in this life is coming to an end. So keep loving one another earnestly as God in Christ has loved you, for love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:7–10). Then you too will hear those words of Christ as you enter into His glory: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt 25:21).

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.