**Ninth Sunday after Trinity**

**Luke 16:1-13**

***The Life of the Found***

Christ Our Lord said to the Disciples: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal (Mt 6.19-21). For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jesus gave this instruction in the Sermon on the Mount as He taught the Church what our relationship with mammon—money, time, possessions, and other things of this world—ought to look like. Jesus does the same again today as we hear the opening of Luke 16, where Jesus speaks to the Pharisees about their love of money. But we know that this love of money and the evils it brings is not limited to the Pharisees because every one of us falls into the same trap of loving money and the rest of mammon more than God and neighbor.

Jesus does this teaching through the Parable of the Unjust Steward, or Manager, as the ESV calls him. What is a steward? A steward is given control over the property of another and is expected for care for the owner’s possessions as if they were his own. This steward in the Parable is not a good steward. This is no surprise. Remember how the steward describes himself: he is too weak and lazy to do an honest day’s work and too arrogant to ask for help. You wouldn’t want someone like that in charge of the most menial of tasks, let alone managing every aspect of your estate! One day a charge is brought to the owner that his estate is being run by a thief. A fellow employee notices this and keeps the Seventh Commandment, helping the owner improve and protect his possessions and income. But the owner is merciful, even in the face of this terrible crime. He could have had the dishonest steward imprisoned for life or possibly even put to death for his crime, but he simply dismisses him, saying, “You can no longer be steward.” And instead of binding him hand and foot and casting him into prison the owner gives him time to get the estate’s affairs in order. As the dismissed steward begins this task everything seems hopeless. He asks himself, “What shall I do? I am too weak and lazy to do honest labor, and I am too proud to beg and ask for help. And then he has his “Eureka!” moment: I know what I will do!” He gathers the debtors of his master and has them rewrite their bills. They don’t simply take their bills, cross out the old debt and write a new number, because then his new crime would be discovered in addition to those that lead to his dismissal. He has them destroy their bills and agreements to repay the debt and has them write entirely new documents and signs off on them. His signature still carries the same weight as the owner’s, and until he turns in the books his signature is still valid. What he does is not only dishonest, but it is illegal. But this behavior is something we would expect of someone who has a history of dishonesty. But then comes something we don’t expect: The duped owner praises the steward for his shrewdness, his quick, devious wisdom. The owner in no way says he steward did the right thing, nor is he rewarded for what he did, but the owner commends him for thinking on his feet to bring a self-serving end to his problem that otherwise would have brought great disgrace.

And then comes an even greater shock: Jesus tells us to act similarly! Why would Jesus tell us to be shrewd with unrighteous mammon, the material goods of this world, to use them for our good instead shunning it as we might expect?

This is the wrong question. The right question is the Lutheran one: What does this mean? What is Jesus really saying? Jesus is telling us to see the treasures of this world which can be stolen, which are fleeting and destroyed by moth and rust not as the end goal, not as the thing to be hoarded and coveted and worshipped, but as things to be used in service of your faith and your eternal life, which is the one thing needful. Take a page from the playbook of the unjust steward, from the sons of this age. They want mammon and they stop at nothing to acquire it. They put their money where their mouth is, where their treasure is their heart is there also. If you say having faith and being received into God’s eternal dwelling is the ultimate longing of your body, soul, and spirit, what are you doing with time, money, heart, and flesh to see this longing come to fruition? You cannot save yourself. You cannot create saving faith in your heart. Only the Holy Spirit can call you by the Gospel and keep you in the true faith. But you can reject this work. You can avoid the banquet where Jesus is present to feed hour faith, your soul. So, ask yourself: What am I doing with my mammon to support what I claim is my ultimate longing? Am I setting aside time to be in the word, not only on Sunday but throughout the week? Am I supporting my church with talent, time, and money? Am I helping others have the same access to Word and Sacrament that I enjoy by supporting missionaries at home and abroad? Am I denying the flesh, bringing it into subjection, praying to be delivered from temptation? Am I being a faithful steward of the body and life entrusted me by God Himself? Am I learning from Israel’s example, written for my instruction? Am I seeking out the gifts of Jesus Christ that give me what I truly need: His crucifixion and resurrection, His Body and Blood, His Absolution, and His Holy Spirit? No. Not one of us act in a way that serves the new man born from the Font We are not faithful in mammon, the least important thing which means we are not faithful when it comes to our faith, the greatest thing. You attempt to serve God and mammon and are punched by that harsh reality: You cannot serve two masters. You have not striven against the flesh and its evil desire. You have lived as an idolater, loving the things of earth which will fail, which will be taken from you when your life ends, instead of living to receive the things that create and strengthen faith, that imperishable gift, more precious than gold (1pe 1.7).Repent.

Repent, but do not despair. The true Master of heaven and earth, of body and soul, of mammon and faith gives away His kingdom for free. He forgives debts. He does not simply tell you to sit down and write a new agreement with a reduced debt , but a completely eliminated debt and a balance owed to you. He does this not because you deserve it or because of your shrewdness or wisdom or good works, but because Jesus Christ, the Owner, your Lord and Master, died in your place. In His bitter Passion and death He paid the debt you owe for your crimes of being an unjust steward of body and earthly goods, for attempting to serve two masters and loving the evil one over the good. The management, the books are not taken from you, but your name is now found written in the Book of life through Jesus’ Blood and merit.

And it doesn’t stop with that cancelled debt. Remember: Through Christ a balance is owed to you. Part of that was paid to you at your Baptism when life immortal was made yours. That balance has already been added to in the Absolution, in the living voice of Jesus in the Holy Gospel and even more awaits you when the very Body and Blood of Jesus are given you for your forgiveness, strengthening of your faith, and the increased love of neighbor through the Holy Communion. And on top of all that the Holy Spirit is yours to cause the increase of sanctification, that is growth in good works, the desire for that which serves faith and eternal life. The balance owed to you will be paid in full when this body fand the things of this earth fail, and you are received into the eternal dwelling which Jesus has gone ahead of you to prepare.

Until that day Jesus Christ, by His Holy Spirit will keep your heart set, not on those things that are temporary, but on the treasure prepared for you above.