

15th Sunday after Pentecost
September 21, 2025
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

Luke 16:1-13 (EHV)

Jesus also said to his disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager who was accused of wasting his possessions. ²The rich man called him in and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you can no longer be manager.’

³“The manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, since my master is taking away the management position from me? I am not strong enough to dig. I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from my position as manager, people will receive me into their houses.’

⁵“He called each one of his master's debtors to him. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He said, ‘Six hundred gallons of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write three hundred.’ ⁷Then he said to another, ‘How much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘Six hundred bushels of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and write four hundred and eighty.’

⁸“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the children of the light are. ⁹I tell you, make friends for yourselves with unrighteous mammon, so that when it runs out, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings. ¹⁰The person who is faithful with very little is also faithful with much. And the person who is unrighteous with very little is also unrighteous with much. ¹¹So if you have not been faithful with unrighteous mammon, who will entrust you with what is really valuable? ¹²If you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something to be your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Jesus directed his teaching sometimes at the crowds of regular people, sometimes at the Pharisees and leaders of the Jews, and sometimes at his disciples. Today, he especially directs this teaching at his disciples. Since we are also followers of Christ, disciples, we do well to listen to this teaching too. But again, it is a difficult teaching of Jesus and even the example he uses is difficult for us to follow. Jesus holds up the example of an unrighteous man for us to follow.

This man was about to lose his job as manager because he had wasted his master's possessions. He was not a good manager of the household. But before he was finished, he was able to intentionally cost his master even more money. He cut the bill of one of his master's debtors in half and another he cut by 20%. He was being fired for being incompetent but then he went and committed fraud by these actions. His master should have arrested him and thrown him into prison until he paid back everything. But here is the plot twist. The master commends this man for acting shrewdly. For by his immoral actions, he had secured future employment with those he had helped.

So here is the lesson that Jesus wants us to learn today – Take it easy at work. Don't worry about working hard, integrity, honesty, or competency. And if you get fired, make sure to steal from your employer and give it to someone else who will help you get the next job. Actually, that doesn't sound right, does it? Jesus says this:

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valuable? ¹²If you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you something to be your own? ¹³No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

The point is not to be incompetent, lazy, corrupt employees. The point is to be shrewd. We are to be wise in the use of the things of this world toward the goals that God has given. Jesus compares two groups which he calls the children of the world and the children of the light. The first group is comprised of those who are without Christ. All they have is the world. The goals of the children of the world are things like job success, long life, health, money, friends, family, fun, and so on. The children of the world are shrewd in the way they strive for whatever goals they have.

I was listening to a podcast by Christian Life Resources recently. Their podcast is called “Life Challenges” and is worth the listen as they help you think through life issues from a biblical perspective. On a recent episode they talked about a couple who found a way to have a really large family. They ended up with something like 21 children. How did they achieve this goal of a large family? By paying multiple women to be surrogates. The courts in whatever country this happened are trying to figure out if any laws were broken. We would say that is not wise biblically, but it may be a legal way for the children of this world to achieve the goal of a large family. Shrewd indeed.

However, we are children of the light. Jesus is the Light of the World and he has paid for our sins with his own blood. He has purchased us out of the kingdom of darkness and brought us into his wonderful light. We are forgiven and have been given the gift of eternal life through faith in Christ. As children of the light our goals and methods are different from the children of the world, but we are still to be shrewd in achieving these goals.

We often pray for our goal in the Lord’s Prayer. Thy kingdom come. We want God’s kingdom to come to us, that is, we want God to keep us in the faith which the Holy Spirit has given. We want our Father to keep our children in their baptismal grace. We want to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We want our faith to be refined and strengthened throughout our time here until he brings us into his heavenly kingdom.

Do the hours we spend scrolling through social media help us reach the goal? Does getting worked up about politics or sports get us closer to the Lord and his Word? Is dreaming about having whatever clothes or cars or house someone else has, or trying to cheer ourselves up with endless memes a shrewd use of our time as children of the light? Or perhaps we use much of our time participating in or watching athletic competitions. If these happen to interfere with time in God’s Word, we push off God’s word until next week or next month. And then there is the topic of money management. Have we managed the money God has given so that we are able to generously give to the spreading of the gospel along with taking care of ourselves and our family and paying our taxes? If God called us before him to give an account of our management of time and money, we would be fired too. All of us have wasted our Lord’s gifts in this world and not always used our time and possessions for the goals of children of the light.

Jesus identifies the problem clearly. “You cannot serve both God and mammon.” This word, mammon, is likely related to the word, Amen. We like “amen”, but “mammon” has a very negative connotation. Amen means that we agree, that we believe, that we trust what was just spoken. Mammon is the stuff of the world that people trust. It is money and possessions, wealth and riches that become the object of trust in the place of God. This mammon can push God into second place whether it is a little or a lot. When we children of the light fail to control the mammon of life, it soon controls us. Our thoughts and discussions can focus on the fear of losing what mammon we have or of increasing our mammon to give us security and safety. Instead of using mammon shrewdly to serve God’s purposes and goals, it becomes our master, and we serve it.

Thanks be to God’s Son that he did not lose focus on the goal of the coming of God’s kingdom. Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, so that we might become rich. Jesus gave up the

riches and glory of heaven to become a true human being. He gave up the right to have everyone bow before him on earth as the King of the universe so that he could suffer and die in the place of every sinner. He made perfect use of his time and every resource to carry out the salvation of the world. Through faith in Christ, we are forgiven for our bad management of God's earthly gifts of time and money. God has not fired us for our bad management but has forgiven us.

Now, he calls on us who are forgiven children of the light to be shrewd in the use of his earthly gifts. You might have a smart phone that can be a big time waster. Or it could be a way to connect with and encourage people in your life with God's Word by talking, texting, messaging, photos, and videos. Be wise in the use of technology to let your light shine. God may use that to bring or keep someone in his kingdom. What joy there will be when someone welcomes you in heaven and says to you, "Thanks for your encouragement and forgiveness and for pointing me to my Savior." That is making friends with unrighteous mammon.

We can do the same with our money. Put your money behind the prayer, "Thy kingdom come." What does this look like? It looks like being intentional in your generous giving. If you truly desire for the Lord to keep you in his kingdom through faith and you desire for many to be your friends in heaven, you will put some part of your money towards this purpose. Of course, we cannot buy anyone a ticket to heaven. We are not selling indulgences here. But we can buy Bibles and Sunday School materials. We can pay for a building in which to gather around God's Word and Sacraments. We can pool our mammon together with many other believers to send a missionary to gather more people into the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel. Our gifts of money help to train pastors to proclaim the Word in the many established congregations. Monetary gifts put Lutheran teachers in Lutheran classrooms where children are kept in their baptismal grace through the Word of God.

Jesus' encouragement today is to be shrewd, wise, in how you manage the mammon of this world. Be intentional. Actually plan to use it for the good of your family, for the good of your neighbors by paying taxes, for the good of someone's eternal soul by giving to places that bring the gospel to others. Be a great manager of all that God gives us in this world so that when we leave this world we will be greeted in heaven by those who were blessed by our management of time and treasure.

Amen.