

Ninth Sunday after Trinity
Luke 16:1-9 (ESV)
28 July 2024

Jesus said, “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lord’s blessings to all of you today, dear ones. I pray that it’s well with all of you and that the words of our Lord from our Gospel lesson today have been deeply impressed upon you and have taken root in your hearts and minds. Because He has much to teach us today with the parable of the unjust manager.

Of course, our Lord has many things to teach us throughout the Gospels about our common life together in Him as the sons of Light and the heirs of the kingdom of heaven. But especially significant in our Gospel lesson today is what our Lord preaches to us not just about being good stewards of all that God has given us, but also about becoming dearly beloved to one another—all of us as Christians—and doing so with a godly shrewdness, making close, trusting relationships with one another as the children of God in a very perceptive and deliberate manner. That’s what He has for us today.

And it may go without saying that out of all our Lord’s parables, this one is for many the single most confusing and difficult to interpret. And it may well come as a shock that our Lord chides us in this parable, holding up for our contemplation a scheming, thieving, worldly-minded man as He does, and that this parable is meant to be a corrective for us and our dealings with each other as the sons of Light.

Now, we certainly need to be clear about a few things here at the outset. We need to be clear and recognize that the same Who Lord gives us this parable is the same Lord Who gave the 10 Commandments. And He’s *not* condoning wastefulness or theft. By no means. But what He is holding up for us as an example is the shrewd *manner* in which the unjust manager made friends who, after facing judgment from the master, would benefit him even as he benefitted them.

And suffice it to say, at least at this point, that if the sons of *this* age who are devoid of the light of Christ, darkened in their mind and in all their ways—if even *they* are shrewd in their dealings with each other and in making friends among their own generation who will only be of *temporary* benefit to one another, how much more should we have a godly sort of shrewdness as we make friends amongst ourselves within the Church?

How much more should we be perceptive and deliberate in befriending each other with the love of Christ as Christians who will benefit one another—not just now, but even *then* in the age to come, when together we will come home into the eternal dwellings promised us by our Lord?

Well, it’s certainly clear enough from our text in Luke 16 that Christ is, in fact, speaking to His disciples and therefore to us. Just prior, in Luke 15, our Lord focuses on the lost whom He

came to seek and to save: there we hear the parable of the lost sheep; the parable of the lost coin; the parable of the prodigal son. And now in the beginning of Luke 16, things shift, and Jesus specifically teaches His disciples. He teaches those whom He has found—those whom He has saved and illumined from within as the Light of the World, making them the sons of light, as we are through holy baptism. He’s preaching to us, dear ones, as His beloved, baptized disciples. And look at the parable our Lord commends to us.

In it, we find, of course, a worldly-minded man who’s obtained a very prominent, very lucrative role managing the estate of an extravagantly wealthy master, the generous patron of a large community who was well-known and well-respected throughout. And for all intents and purposes, the unjust manager was his right-hand man.

And now look what he does when he gets caught wasting his master’s possessions. He finds himself in a very precarious spot. He knows it’s only a matter of time—and a short one at that—before he must face the full judgment of his master and give an account of his stewardship. He knows he’s too weak to dig, too ashamed to beg, and so he comes up with a plan for how he’ll carry on with life after facing the judgment. And suddenly he becomes very astute, keenly aware of all that’s still yet at his disposal, all that will help him make friends who will receive him into their homes and will be of some temporary benefit to him just as he would be for them.

The unjust manager thus begins imitating his master, whom he knew beyond all doubt, to be a kind-hearted, generous man—a man who wouldn’t require back what had been forgiven on his behalf, even if he had every legal right to do so—he wouldn’t do it. Because this wealthy man had a reputation, which he would not so easily let go of. He’d much sooner let go of the great debts owed him than lose his reputation for generosity and mercy towards others.

The unjust manager banks on this—pun intended—and he begins forgiving debts owed to his master. And for the manager, this was not a time for him to be greedy or stingy. No, he needed to be generous and merciful, to use things like wheat and oil that he still had stewardship of, so that he’d be received into the homes of the friends he made.

It was a sneaky, shadowy plot. It was shrewd and illegal, to be sure. But our Lord has a lesson for us in all of it as the sons of light.

Because, dear ones, life for us will continue after death, after we too are compelled to relinquish our stewardship of the things God’s given us and when we too must give an account in the day of judgment.

But because our beloved Master, Jesus, is so merciful and so generous that He shed His holy, precious blood for us—of more value than all of heaven and earth combined—He is pleased to forgive us our debts and give us the *true* riches of the kingdom of God—even calling us His “friends,” dearly beloved to Him, for whom He laid down His very life. No man has greater love than this, dear ones. And we look forward to receiving our commendation from Him, our gentle Master on that great day that’s coming soon.

And in the meantime, He's also pleased when we imitate Him in showing mercy and generosity, using the temporal, mundane, worldly things He's given us to befriend one another in the Church especially with the love He's shown us.

That's what He means when He says, "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings." Of course, He's not talking about us embezzling money or any wicked thing like that. But the word for unrighteous that He uses here is broad, and it describes that which bears a connection to this evil world we live in—the point being that as the sons of light and in a manner, not identical, but *similar* to the manager in the parable, we should be piously shrewd as we make use of worldly things to befriend and benefit one another now because life will go on for us after the judgment.

And our Master would see us gladly welcome and be welcomed by one another in the eternal dwellings to come and for us to be able to say to each other, "I'm so glad that even in the days of old, even back then in the evil world we lived in, there was no greediness or stinginess separating us. And I saw the light of Christ shining brightly in you with how generous and merciful you were towards me. You reflected His glory like the moon reflecting the sun. And now our friendship in the Lord shines so much more brightly and brilliantly because of it, because of how we sacrificed for each other, forgiving each other and opening the rich treasury of Christian love to one another with joy."

This is what He wants for us, dear ones—rich spiritual friendships among the sons of light, which are begun in Him now and will be perfected by Him in the age to come.

May God grant that we would all see such things come to pass. And to Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.