

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

“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. “For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless.”

Jesus often spoke in parables. The disciples even asked Jesus about this as Matthew recorded, “Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”

The parables of Jesus are difficult because their purpose is not to teach about you about how the world operates. No, the parables teach you how God and the Kingdom of heaven work. This is why so often Jesus will begin a parable with a phrase like, “the Kingdom of heaven is like” or “may be compared to.” That’s straightforward enough and we can track with that purpose. Where things get difficult, though, is our minds want to think the opposite of what God teaches. What does this mean? We think the parables are odd when they don’t follow the same way of doing things as we see in the world. We think along the lines of, “that’s not fair and no way to run a business” in the case of the laborers in the vineyard. Or we scratch our heads at the bridegroom and the ten virgins. Things sound off to us because our reference point is what we know or to put it as Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3, “we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen.”

Jesus preached the parables to teach you the things of God and in him, the Lord, you have the wisdom God gives. You approach his word in the humility of repentance and faith. You get a glimpse into God’s action and his dominion. It’s not a full picture it’s a figure of speech; it’s like or compared to as Jesus says. Yet the reality and wisdom impacted is nonetheless beneficial. Your Lord gives you these images and delivers to you the brings the Kingdom of God to you and accomplished his will in your midst, Jesus.

Considering this about parables, then, you hear the Gospel reading today and God calls you to hear with the ears of faith. He calls you to see what he is teaching as telling you about himself and what he does for you in Christ. And when you do this is gives you the wisdom to see the world differently you are a son of light and you view the things around you in a different, well, “light.” Likewise, you see the master as one who has master who is gracious and merciful. And this master is no different than the other parables. You have a master who is a King who would send his own Son to be killed by the ones to whom he was sent. You see the owner of the vineyard who doesn’t treat people according to how much work they have done, rather it’s out of his mercy and the promises he makes to them. You the one who stops by along the way stoops down to lift you out of the ditch, carries you to shelter and pays for everything you need. This is the wisdom of God in Christ.

And this forms you and shapes you to your very core. Jesus said, “For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.” That’s a warning to you first. In the Epistle reading God inspired St. Paul to write, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.” There’s always that dynamic in the dishonest (really the word is unrighteous) manager. Jesus preaches that to you today. When you look around you and you see sinners in the fallen world don’t be surprised when they are good at sinning and profaning the name of God. Don’t be surprised when people work the system, manipulate, and do what they can to save face. Your warning is to watch yourself. That type of thinking and action are not who you are as a Christian. You are different. You have been sanctified and called out of the darkness and into the marvelous light of Christ. Your mind and heart are set toward the things of God. You desire the path of wisdom, the Scriptures and way of Jesus, as you go through this world because you belong to the Kingdom of God.

This means, then, look at what this man did in the parable and take note. Don't fall into the temptation of thinking like the world thinks. Instead of this crucify your desires and the wants of your old Adam. Pray, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Tell your sinful nature that you will have none of that. In the Old Testament reading God said, "With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless; with the purified you deal purely, and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous. You save a humble people, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down." God knows your thoughts, your ways, and what you really desire. He knows your heart and there's no way to wiggle yourself out of what he demands.

Here's the thing in all this too. As you know Jesus and then you look at the parable from the perspective of the master, what do you see? The focus is *not* on the *dishonesty* of the steward, but on the *mercy* of the master. Our sinful nature when confronted tries to wiggle its way out of condemnation. You see, there's something in all of this and it's something the world, the sons of this generation will never understand. It's something you only see and know in your God given faith.

When you fix your eyes on Christ you behold your Lord and see him and his mercy. He doesn't excuse your sin away but the very God who knows your sin is the God who has shown you mercy. Listen again to those words from Old Testament reading, "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. For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless." He has done this in Christ crucified for you.

God doesn't desire your sacrifices or your attempts to try and make things right to cover up what has been done. Instead, God says in Psalm 51, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Or as David wrote in the Old Testament reading which was near the end of his life after being delivered from many who were trying to kill him, "For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless." Beholding the life of King David is many things but one of the foremost is that in his life we see God's mercy shine putting David's sin away.

When you focus on the dishonest manger you will see nothing but manipulation and sin. When you focus on the master you see his great mercy. He didn't immediately send his steward to jail or some other punishment but look upon him with the eyes of mercy. God doesn't see you sin and immediately send you to hell. No, he has sent his Son to be your substitute who has taken the guilt upon himself and suffered the just punishment you deserve. Look to yourself, look to others and you will see sin. Look in faith to Christ and you have your merciful God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. This is your master. This is your Lord, Christ.

This, then, forms your whole life. You are defined by the mercy of God in Christ. Even your dealings with the things of this world are instructed by God and his word. Jesus concludes the Gospel reading saying, "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." As a son of light, a Christian, you use the things of this world for the sake of God and his Kingdom. Be wise in Christ every day and the prudence to discern how to use the things you have. You use your vocations and things for the sake of your neighbors and to point them to God. The stuff of the world, the mammon, will fail but the word of God endures forever. It's the same for those whom you teach the faith to and concern yourself with. You can amass all the stuff in this world but one day it will all be gone. Your salvation, however, is forever and so it is for your fellow saints. This is especially the case as a parent when you take care of your children with earthly goods but place first and foremost Christ and his world. That's the eternal inheritance you give to your children even if you drag them kicking and screaming as a child or adult to where salvation is given out.

Jesus spoke in parables and even in the ones that seem difficult like today's Gospel reading, your Lord reveals to you how your Lord and his Kingdom work. You behold your Lord and see you have a place in his Kingdom by grace through faith in him. What joy, dear Christians, to have the mercy of God in Christ. Know who your Lord is and see what he has done in redeeming you. When confronted with your sin don't leave it to yourself and try to make it right.

9th Sunday after Trinity—August 2, 2026

Instead confess it. Go to the person you have sinned against and tell them you are sorry. Go to your pastor whom God has sent to you to deliver the forgiveness of Christ. Make use of the great gift of private confession and absolution. In this, your pastor personally by direct orders from God hears your confession no matter how heinous it may be and says to you individually, “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” There’s no room for doubt in the words of absolution because it’s the word of Jesus for you. When your pastor absolves your sins it’s Jesus himself dealing with you speaking through the mouth of his called and ordained servant.

This too is why is so important to be here in this place. The Kingdom of God is in your midst as Jesus is here this very day. You gather with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Heaven and earth meet in this place and your Lord is here with you and for you. This is the treasure of the Christian faith and life lived in the treasure of the church. You can’t hear God’s word enough. You can’t sing great hymns enough. You can’t have the Lord’s Supper too much. You daily sin much and you need Christ. You need his forgiveness, life, and salvation. Fix your eyes on the Lord and want what he gives for he showers you with mercy. He really does and where this happens is the Divine Service. This place right here and in this service is you standing before your Lord and him seeing the account of your doings. You gather in this place and cry out, “Lord have mercy!” God’s answer is to forgive you. You give you Christ and his benefits in word and sacraments. When you rightly do not deserve to be called his son your Lord is the Father who welcomes you back into his home with outstretched arms of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. That’s who your Lord is because his arms are marked with the signs of his crucifixion where has paid the price for you. He welcomes you to himself. Your Lord gives and you receive. You have what he gives now and look forward to the day when you see him face to face at the eternal feast which knows no end. This is the priceless treasure you have now and forever.

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