

**September 26, 2010**  
**Pentecost 18**  
**Walking Together Sunday**

*"We Have the Treasures of God's Kingdom"*

**LUKE 16:1-13**

---

**J**esus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. <sup>2</sup> So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.' <sup>3</sup> "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg-- <sup>4</sup> I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.' <sup>5</sup> "So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup> "Eight hundred gallons of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.' <sup>7</sup> "Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?' "A thousand bushels of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, 'Take your bill and make it eight hundred.' <sup>8</sup> "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. <sup>9</sup> I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. <sup>10</sup> "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. <sup>11</sup> So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? <sup>13</sup> "No servant can serve two masters. 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 Money."

Some of the parables or stories that Jesus told have a way of getting our attention. Last Sunday we heard in the gospel reading about a shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep by themselves and goes after the one lost sheep. Ordinarily a shepherd would not think of leaving the 99 sheep to fend for themselves and go after the one lost sheep. Jesus wanted to emphasize how much he cares for every person who is lost and how much he wants them in his kingdom.

This story about the shrewd manager sure gets our attention. Here is an accountant who cheats his boss out of money so he can make a better situation for himself when he is fired from his job. Jesus points to that man's shrewdness and tells us this is how we need to be in the kingdom of God. He is not advocating that we be dishonest. Instead he encourages us to be shrewd and careful in how we handle the treasures of God's kingdom which are far more valuable than money and earthly possessions.

During this month of September members our national church body, the WELS, are setting aside a Sunday to encourage each other to work together and help each other do a better job of caring for the treasures of God's kingdom which have been entrusted to us. Before ascending into heaven Jesus told Christians of every age to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." He also

encourages us to teach people all over the world about this treasure of God's love that we have in Jesus his beloved Son.

### **Look at how rich you are**

Do we always make the most of every opportunity the Lord give us to bring the treasures of salvation to other people? No, we need constant encouragement in this work. At first we may think that Jesus is certainly choosing a strange story to show us how important how time is on this earth to bring the gospel to other people. He talks to us about handling money to help us see that how we handle our money will help us see the greater value of handling the treasures of God's kingdom.

A rich man had a manager or accountant who was accused of wasting money. He asks the man to meet with him and show him the books. He knew he was going to get fired or even thrown into jail for mismanaging the rich man's account. So what does this clever fellow do? He goes to the people who owed something to the rich man and reduces the amount that was owed. One man owes 800 gallons of olive oil. That is a lot of olive oil and it was worthy a lot of money. He sits down with the man and helps him write up a new bill that says 400 gallons. Today we would say, "He cooked the books." To another who owed a thousand bushels of wheat he said, "Take your bill and make it 800." His strategy was to make friends of these debtors so they would give him a job when he was fired.

Are thieves good at what they do? Are they clever? This past week the name of Bernie Madhoff was in the news again. He is the guy who swindled and made off with hundreds of millions of dollars from people. People are still scratching their heads in amazement at how clever that guy was in making off with the money of rich people. What about drug smugglers? Think of all the clever ways the drug dealers devise to get drugs into our country from Mexico, or plant pot farms in the national forests. We would not think of pointing to these people as role models for our children on how to be clever and shrewd, because it might lead them to think that dishonesty is OK.

Jesus is not encouraging us to be dishonest, but he is encouraging us to be careful and resourceful in how we manage things that are far more important than money. He says, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal dwellings." After saving you and making you a dear child of your heavenly Father, Jesus gives you opportunities to help other people with the money he gives you. Some day in heaven people will thank you for how you helped them here on this earth. Maybe it was a friend who needed financial help. Maybe it will be a person from India who thanks you for being part of the WELS which supports missionaries who teach people about Jesus and the blessings they have in him.

Jesus is not telling us to use our money to help people so that someday we will be rewarded with heaven. Spending all your money to help the poor cannot remove one single sin from your past life. Only Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection and his perfect life can expunge the sins from your record and mine. Jesus made all of this so clear for us with the illustration of the vine and the branches. He takes us when we are dead branches, fit to be thrown into the fire, attaches us to him so that we are clean and pure and accepted through him. Then he allows us to bear fruit out of love for him. Some of this fruit is

the way we manage and use our money to help other people. The Revelation tells us, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor, and their deeds will follow them." Some day in heaven I will have an eternity to thank the members of this church for all the encouragement and support you have given to me as your pastor.

### **Look at how you can share these riches**

How you handle little things often reflects on how you will handle bigger and more important things in life. Jesus said, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth who will trust you with true riches." If a boss discovers an accountant falsifying reports in one small area, he will wonder if the accountant is falsifying reports in another area. I am holding up a twenty dollar bill. How I manage something small and unimportant such as this money may reflect on how I manage other parts of my life that are more important.

What am I going to do with the money the Lord gives me? I am going to give a portion of this money to the Lord. I will decide to give a certain percentage to the Lord even in these difficult times. I will strive with God's help to maintain that percentage even when things get tight. I will use this money to support my family. I will use it to support my government by faithfully paying my taxes. I will use it to help people who are in need, including a generous tip for a table server who is struggling to make ends meet. I want to do my best out of love for Christ to manage the money the Lord gives.

But then, my dear Christians, we have this hope and this desire that the Lord will place into our lives greater responsibility in other more important areas of life. Jesus sits at the right hand of the heavenly Father and he entrusts into our lives the privilege of handling what Jesus calls "true riches." Think of your king Jesus coming to you and opening up this treasure chest. It is not filled with hundred dollar bills or gold and silver and jewels. It is a treasure chest filled with something far more important. It is a treasure chest filled with the love that he gained for you by his death and his resurrection. This is a love we do not deserve. One glance at one part of your life this past week shows you how far you have fallen short of his glory. As one hymn writer wrote, "Foul and full of sin I am. I am all unrighteousness." Yet Jesus was willing to be cursed and forsaken by his own Father, punished in our place, so we could be forgiven and loved in this life and for all eternity. Think of the treasure that is yours when you say with King David, "Goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Ah, the riches of God's kingdom are far more valuable than silver and gold and money in the bank. The Lord allows us to occupy a certain amount of time and space in this life so we can share these riches and treasures with us. In 1 Corinthians 4 the Apostle Paul writes, "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God." We have a secret worth sharing. We want a world full of people to know this amazing secret that people are loved by God not on the basis of our efforts at self improvement, but only through Jesus who died and gave his life for all. I am not happy with how I am doing at using the time the Lord is giving me to share these riches with other people, and if you are honest you would have to say the same about yourself. I want to improve. I want to be better. I want to pray more and pray more and pray more.

I want be more tuned into sharing these riches of God's kingdom with others. This is a godly desire that is pleasing to the Lord.

This morning we will what the people at Sure Foundation Lutheran Church are doing in New York City to reach people with these treasures of salvation. Some of the money from our budget here at Star of Bethlehem goes to supporting such outreach efforts. We are always looking for other people to use as examples to help us improve in our efforts to be more faithful in managing the treasures the Lord has given us. Jesus gives us the story of this shrewd manager to help us see what a privilege it is to have and share the treasures of his kingdom. Sometimes a business has to close and they give away the store. The Lord wants us to use our limited time to give away the store, the riches of his kingdom. What a privilege that is for us and our fellow members in the WELS. Amen.