

Trinity 9 (August 8 – 9, 2009)

Luke 16:1-13

“Outrageous Love”

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our text for today is the Gospel lesson just read, the parable of the unrighteous servant. We focus on the words of Jesus: And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

Here is a parable Our Lord didn't tell but could have: a certain policeman came home from work and found a thief robbing his house. The policeman's wife and children were tied up, but the thief was caught by surprise and unarmed. The policeman restrained the thief and freed his wife and children. Then he made out his will. He gave all his goods, his house, his car, his pension, and his savings, to the thief. Then he told the wife and children to love the thief as they had loved him. He gave them to the thief as his inheritance. Then he freed the thief and handed him the gun. When the thief put the gun to the policeman's head, the policeman said, **“This is good. Now you can have what you want. I give you what you sought to steal. You get what you want and that pleases me.”** The thief killed the policeman and moved into his house and they lived happily ever after.

This isn't how policemen, enforcers of the law, behave in our world. But it is how the Lord behaves. It is no less outrageous than a Shepherd dying for sheep or a rancher dying for cattle. The point of all the parables is contrast. Our Lord is not like us. We expect shepherds to fleece and slaughter sheep. We expect Samaritans to walk on by. We expect merchants to buy fields and goods for the sake of profit.

But Our Lord is not like us. He is unlike any shepherd, Samaritan, merchant, father, king, or policeman that we know. Our Lord is righteous and He is merciful.

This is the parable of the unrighteous steward. The Lord is righteous. The steward is not. The steward is wasting the Lord's goods. He must give an account. He can no longer be steward. But the steward is shrewd and self-serving. So he gives away the Lord's goods for free. His motives are altogether evil. He does not want to work. He is ashamed to beg. He seeks to make friends for himself. But it works, and he not only makes friends for himself, he makes friends for the Lord and he is commended by the Lord for it. This is not what we expect. We expect the steward to be further rebuked and punished. If his first actions were criminal, his later actions are double.

So here is the point: the Lord is not like us. An expected Gospel is no Gospel. The Lord wants His goods to be given away. He is generous. His love is extravagant, unexpected, undeserved. The steward fails and wastes the Lord's goods when he holds on to them. But when he forgives debts and gives away the Lord's goods the Lord is pleased and praises him, like a policeman giving away his house to a thief.

This is the power of God unto salvation. The Lord forgives our evil. He loves us despite us. We sometimes think this is like a teacher letting us re-take a test. It costs Him nothing. He is just being nice. It has all the weight of saying “**thank you**” to the cashier after you pay her. It is being polite. We think this way because we think our sins are small things, little mistakes, that are easily overlooked, and that they don't really concern the Lord.

They do matter the Lord. They would not have concerned Him for He is sovereign and unchangeable. But He joined Himself to our Flesh. He took up our cause by being born as a Man in our sinful world. He walked the earth as one of us, with calluses, bruises, hunger, and fatigue. He used the outhouse and wiped sweat off of his brow. He was lied to and tricked, disappointed and cheated. As a Man, He denied Himself. Our God in our flesh, from the time of His conception through His resurrection, did not allow Himself to fully or always use His Divine rights and powers. That denial meant that He was tempted in every way that we are and worse; that He knew all our physical desires and pains. He knew sorrow from the death of loved ones. He knew betrayal by friends. He knew what it was to be slandered and have your reputation destroyed. He had His heart broken. So too He knew what it was to be mocked, beaten, and spit upon.

He knew what it was to die. He not only kept the Law in that He did everything it said to do and did nothing that it forbid, that is, He did not sin; but He also kept the Law in allowing it to do to Him everything it should have done to us. He suffered its wrath and punishment. He took on our flesh to keep the Law that He might then take on our sin and be killed for it, that we would live, that sin would be dead and have no more dominion over us. This is how He gives away the kingdom and saves us.

This always upsets the lovers of money. That is to say: it upsets us. You cannot serve God and mammon. To think there must be more, that the Lord's payment was not enough, that Christians must add to His payment, or that the stuff of this life is what is to be trusted, is to deny the Lord's payment and pronouncement, and to seek to make your own way or add your own certainty.

It certainly does seem too easy to our fallen minds. Our cynical flesh quips: **“There is no such thing as a free lunch.”** We are scared that the Gospel of Jesus Christ might be a trap or a joke. We do not want to be hurt or disappointed or laughed at. We are afraid to believe. Faith feels risky. We are afraid that is all just a fantasy, beautiful and interesting, but no more real than Middle Earth.

There is also something of a double standard in us. Our fallen flesh likes to think we've gotten where we are by hard work and discipline, but others, especially our friends, have gotten lucky or had things handed to them. We might be willing to accept the free grace of God for ourselves and our loved ones because we know that deep down we are actually good and decent despite our sins, but we aren't so sure about others. They might not appreciate it or understand it. At the very least, a co-payment for grace, as a check for those who will take it seriously, seems reasonable.

Repent. The parables aren't case studies in business practice, law enforcement, family management, or animal husbandry. The Lord is not like us. Thanks be to God: He is not like us. He is gracious and merciful. He loves to forgive. He loves to give away His Kingdom. Find peace in this grace and love. It is not a trap or a fantasy. What we think of the real world is unreal. Death is the fantasy. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He will set you free.

And there is a cost. Your salvation is not free. The Lord God, Jesus Christ, has died for it. He has laid down His life in order to place His Name upon you, to feed you with His Holy Body and Blood. He has made the payment in full, in Himself. Judged by the standards of commerce, farming, and statecraft it is absolutely insane, almost criminal, like an unrighteous steward. But in the Kingdom of God unrighteous stewards are honored and set up as the standard.

The Lord is sovereign. He can do what He wants. What He wants is to have you. For this reason He has taken on your burden and price on His own, by His own compulsion and desire. He forgives your sins. This is what He wanted: to have you forever, to never be separated from you. And He was willing to meet the demands of His own Law on your behalf to obtain you, to make you His friend, to give you His Kingdom.

In the Name of the Father and of the  Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.