

August 1, 2010
Trinity 9
Luke 16:1-13
“What Do you Own? Or What Owns You?”
Fort McCoy, WI

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

When someone places his possessions under a caretaker, or steward, it is because of necessity or convenience. It is because the person cannot take care of everything by himself or doesn't want to be bothered. But in the case of Our Lord it is quite different. The Lord God appoints men as caretakers of His stuff not because of necessity or bother, but because of pure grace and mercy.

Nothing in this world is really ours. It is simply entrusted to us for the time being. We have been entrusted with the Lord's stuff that we would use it in thanksgiving according to our needs, or distribute it to our fellow servants according to their needs. It is not lawful to misuse the stuff of the earth or to hoard it. It is not lawful to vandalize or waste, nor is it lawful to claim the right to extravagant expense and display. Gluttony is a sin as sure as sloth. We must render an account of our stewardship when Lord comes. *Who then will stand upon his discretion, his moderation, his careful and just use? Who has never eaten when he was full? Who has never withheld his surplus from his neighbor?* Repent.

We are not placed in this life as lords of our own houses. A man's house is not his castle. It is the Lord's house. The man is a guest. We are stewards. Not only does all the earth belong to the Lord, we ourselves also belong to the Lord. We have been given the right of brief and passing use of the earth. Cast out the pride of dominion. This is not our stuff. We did not earn it. We do not deserve it.

Stop your envy and jealousy. Stop your greed and lust. Stop judging the stewardship of others. Our values are different. An I-Phone is not worth its price to me. It seems wasteful. But I might

well spend more on a bottle of wine than you would, and it would seem wasteful to you. How we spend God's money is our stewardship. Each family is different, deriving a different amount of pleasure or use out of different things. If you've decided television and processed corn syrup are bad for your children, good for you. But don't make rules for everyone else where the Scriptures have left us free. Let each exercise his stewardship according to his own situation and wisdom. Put on the modesty and humility of a steward who knows his place, which is to say, who knows the choices made in his freedom are not binding for others, and who knows he has failed again and again to be a good steward. Repent.

But then comes the surprise. The Lord does not condone thievery. The unjust steward in the parable was a bad steward. He wasted the master's stuff. That is a form of theft. Employees who do not work a full hour steal from their employers who pay by the hour. Workers who waste the material are guilty of stealing. These are condemned in the Scriptures. But Our Lord condones and even praises the injustice of stewardship in the parable when the once-wasteful steward now gives away the goods, where he cancels debts owed to his master. *If Our Lord does not condone thievery, what is He condoning?* He is condoning grace.

The King of Heaven is not like the Kings of earth. He does not give us stewardship because He is too busy to take care of it or because He finds it a bother, but because of His grace and mercy. He gives us a part in His kingdom. He gives it for our joy. And His Kingdom does not run on the economies of men, but the economy of grace. He loves to give away His Kingdom. He is like a vineyard owner who pays those who did not work as though they worked all day. He is like a shepherd who has found a lost sheep and throws a banquet that costs more than the sheep to show His joy. He is like a landowner who sends His Son for the workers to kill that He might hand over to them the inheritance of His murdered Son.

This is grace. He gives us what we do not deserve and could never earn for free. He gives us His Kingdom, His

inheritance, His Name, His love. He says to beggars, to sinners, to poor stewards, **“Friend come up higher.”** He says to those who did poorly, who blew it, who squandered their lives, money, and opportunities, to those who wasted or polluted the earth, who did not do well, who are not good and are not faithful, **“Well done, good and faithful servant.”**

Here is the lesson of all the parables, of all Our Lord's sermons, of all the prophets: you are a sinner. You deserve death. But God is merciful and has paid your debt in the death of His Son. The life, works, and death of Jesus Christ count for you, are bestowed upon you in grace. He welcomes you back as His beloved son. He is not angry. He loves and delights in you.

And now the risen Jesus Christ, alive out of death, in perfect stewardship, pours out His lifeblood once more for you. He gives you His Body and Blood to eat and drink in order to cancel all your debts, regrets, shame, and guilt. He is not wasteful, yet the cup overflows. He gives more than you need, more than you can contain. He is not wasteful, He is extravagant in His generosity. He gives you free reign over the earth. You don't just eat to live, you feast, you banquet, you revel in the gifts the Lord bestows. For by grace you are His friend.

In ✠ Jesus' Name. Amen.