



Sermon — 15th Week after Pentecost

Luke 16:1-15

September 22nd, 2019

“Out of Fatherly, Divine, Goodness, and Mercy”

In 2013 I received a painful and overwhelming phone call. The call was from the program director for my degree path at my university. A part of the Director of Christian Education program at any Concordia University is an internship at a Lutheran congregation somewhere in the country. The goal is immersive, hands-on learning to prepare students to be fulltime directors of Christian education and youth and family ministers in congregations.

However, my internship was not going well. While my internship congregation wasn't the best fit and they had underestimated their requirements for the internship, I was also doing just fine on my own falling flat on my face as an intern. My program director called to tell me that he was ending my internship early and that I'd have to do another one somewhere else.

This was a come-to-Jesus moment for me. One of those moments that left me with no alternative but to recognize the truth in front of me, much like the manager in Jesus' parable in our Gospel reading. In fact, I asked myself the same question, “What shall I do now?”

I couldn't argue anymore. I couldn't justify my mistakes, soft-pedal my shortcomings, or ignore my inadequacies. I could only be honest. And admit my failure.

The manager in the parable finds himself in a come-to-Jesus moment. He doesn't dispute the rich man's words. He knows he's messed up big time. He's as good as fired. As soon as his master sees the books, he's done. There will be no denying it. So he runs through his options. He's too weak to do manual labor and he's too proud to beg. Then, the lightbulb goes off.

The manager realizes his salvation must come from *outside* himself.¹ There's nothing *he* can do; so he gambles on the grace of his master's debtors. He drastically reduces their substantial debts in hopes to be welcomed into their homes when he loses his job.

But then a surprising thing happens. The manager receives the welcome he hoped for, only not from the ones he expected. When the rich man learned what his manager did, he

¹ A. Just, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 615

commended him for his shrewdness. The manager is not praised for his dishonest dealings with his master's debtors, but for his honest admission of where his salvation comes from.²

Like the manager before his master, we are guilty standing before God. His Law accuses us all. In the poetic words of author and speaker Chad Bird,

"He who created the eye—has he not seen your every greedy gaze, your every lustful look?

"He who formed the ear—has he not listened to every lie and hateful word you've spoken?

"He who shaped the hands—do you think he is ignorant of thieving hands, lazy hands, hands bloody from violence and back-stabbing?

"He knows all—not only the sins you remember and are ashamed of, but also those you have forgotten. Even those you never knew you committed."³

There is nothing we can hide from God. He knows our hearts.⁴

And like the manager, we are left asking, "What shall I do now?" Our first inclination is to try to justify ourselves before God and make him happy with us. But this is the same as serving two masters. Here, Jesus' words rebuke us. "No servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other."⁵ Instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things, we put our faith and hope in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

The answer, really, is that *we do nothing*. This is what Jesus hopes to commend to us in this parable. That our salvation—the forgiveness of our sins and our eternal life—lies outside of ourselves and our works. It does not lay with the strength of our faith. The goodness of the things we do. The sins we avoid. How well we're thought of. The political party we're associated with. The amount of money and possessions we have. Or the number of church services we attend.

There is nothing we can do that can justify us before God. Our salvation lies with the "one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people."⁶

The fact that the manager realized his hope and salvation had to come from outside himself is also thanks to his master. At every turn the master is merciful when he should not be.

² K. Baily, *Poet and Peasant*, 107

³ Bird, Chad. "Will Believers Be Judged? Thoughts from the Weirdest Parable Jesus..." 1517, 15 Sept. 2016, www.1517.org/articles/will-believers-be-judged-thoughts-from-the-weirdest-parable-jesus-told.

⁴ Luke 16:15

⁵ Luke 16:13

⁶ 1 Timothy 2:5-6

When the rich man learns of his manager's wastefulness, he doesn't have him seized and thrown in jail, as was within his rights.

Instead, he calls the manager before him and then sends *him* to go get the ledger. It doesn't seem wise to let the man who's as good as fired for wasting your possessions continue to handle the books regarding those possessions. But this merciful master does.

And, he's only going to fire the manager. He doesn't demand that the manager pay back what he has cost him by his wastefulness. Nor does he threaten to throw him in jail for his mismanagement.

On top of that, the manager is playing with house money. It is the rich man's possessions that the manager uses to bet on the benevolence of his master's debtors. Not his own. He has nothing to bet with.

In the same way you and I have nothing. All we have we received from God. As Luther explains in his Small Catechism. "I believe that God has created me and all creatures; that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. "He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, [spouse] and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."

The good and gracious gifts God gives includes the only chip we have to bet before him: Christ's life, suffering, and death for us and for our salvation. He provides the faith we need to realize and believe that Jesus' work is for us in our baptism. There he connects us to Christ's life giving death and resurrection.⁷

Furthermore, he sustains that saving faith by giving us Christ's body and blood under the bread and wine of holy communion given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. All this he gives and does as Luther puts it, "only out of fatherly, divine, goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in" us. **AMEN.**

⁷ Romans 6:3-11