

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 18, 2016
St. Luke 16:1-9
Money Holds Great Value for Service in God's Kingdom
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Dear Friends in Christ,

This common greeting is closely tied to the lesson of Jesus' parable. We are friends "in Christ." What has brought us together? The saving gospel of Jesus Christ is the one thing we have in common. We received the good news in Word and sacrament that created our "one faith" in Jesus Christ. Our only Savior has redeemed us from the guilt and punishment of our sins. We know this because we and others wisely used our money to share this message. That good news brought us together in the kingdom of God now and for eternity.

The kingdom of God is not a part of the world. It is not worldly in nature or goals. The kingdom of God is the polar opposite of the world. However, Jesus taught his disciples and teaches us that we need to use the good judgment others use in their worldly dealings to win other friends in Christ who also will enter eternal life.

Jesus' lesson in the parable of the shrewd manager, also called the unjust steward, is this: **Money Holds Great Value for Service in God's Kingdom.** Wise use of money recognizes this value. Wise use of money wins many friends for Christ.

Jesus told this parable to "his disciples." Our Savior relied on their Spirit endowed wisdom to separate out the larger truth from the minor details. Those details are the frame so to speak that held the one truth Jesus was putting across. The first part of that truth is that the wise use of money recognizes its value.

The rich man's manager, or steward, recognized the value of money. He needed to apply that knowledge when someone discovered his dishonest dealings in his master's affairs. Unlike Joseph who was faithful and honest in managing Potiphar's property, this man had been a crook and a cheat. His master found out about it and dismissed the man. What would he do now to live?

His soft life prevented him from working with his hands. His sinful pride ruled out begging in the streets. So, he used his good sense of the value of money. With no permission from his master, the steward took the bills two debtors owed. He reduced one by 50 percent, the other by 20 percent. They would remember his largess "and welcome him into their homes."

This was a wise or prudent use of money. Even his master had to admit that. The master did not commend his steward's dishonesty, but he did give the devil his due. Jesus summed it up this way, "For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."

The "people of this world" are people who use "worldly wealth" as a tool to provide things of this world for their short time in this world. They do this in concert with "their own kind," others doing the same. They carefully and sensibly keep close tabs on the amount of money they earn and possess. They are astute and knowledgeable in their investments for the future and in their current spending. They may even like the shrewd manager of Jesus' parable be dishonest. Since they know the value of money, their actions, at times underhanded, always seek their advantage.

The "people of the light" are we Christians. Jesus knew we are not as prudent and ordered in our use of the things that matter among ourselves, our kind, the Word and sacraments. We are not as wise in our dealings with each other as we share heavenly treasures like forgiveness,

mercy and peace. Jesus teaches us that the wise use of “worldly wealth” is of great value as we provide those blessings to each other. Jesus is exhorting us to use the world, and the world’s goods against the world and for God.

The second aspect of the truth of our theme, money holds great value for service in God’s kingdom is this: Wise use of money wins many friends for Christ.

“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” People of the world use worldly wealth with their own kind only in this life. All the money they save, and share, and leave as inheritance goes no further than as long as they live and their friends in this life. When they die, it is as Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes, “For the living know they will die but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.” [9:5]

Not so with the people of the light. Jesus tells us to use worldly wealth in a way that wins others who are friends through timeless eternity. The worldly wealth we use in mission work, to build churches, to provide Bible studies and worship services, to do acts of love to our neighbors one day will be gone. Literally, when we are gone, when we die. The benefit from our judicious use of that wealth will continue as those who heard the Word, received the sacraments and believed will join us in eternal dwellings.

These friends are our friends in Christ. We share the realization, and admission to God that we are guilty of secret sins and willful sins. We know those sins deserve punishment. Together we know and confess the Father punished his Son, Jesus for those sins. We know Jesus intercedes on our behalf with the Father as last week we heard Moses intercede on behalf of Israel.

Money holds great value for service in God’s kingdom. The value does not lie in the denomination amount printed on the coin or bill. Jesus is not teaching that the church is a business and should be run with business principles. The value of worldly wealth lies in its wise use and the eternal goals we seek in the kingdom of God. Jesus is teaching us to value what his Father has given us to manage in this world so that others, many others, will be with us forever and ever in eternal dwellings. Amen. <SDG>