A Sermon on this Historic Gospel for the Ninth Sunday After Trinity

Or for any Day set aside to explore and encourage Community Involvement
Prepared for the ELS through the Boards for Home Outreach and for Christian Service

Text: Luke 16.1-9

Theme: The Land is Mine, And You Are Strangers, And My Guests –Leviticus 25.23.

Precis: Stewardship requires faithfulness, according to which we are called to account and at an end of stewardship, but Christ restores us by His grace and accepts our service according to faith.

*INI—Grace, mercy and peace, etc. –Amen.*

You can’t imagine a better text to demonstrate for us that our Lord wants us to think! Or that He challenges the way we think. He wants us to pour over His Words and wonder what He means by them; to give careful thought ~ in light of these words ~ to give careful thought to all our ways.

Jesus shows us a wicked, unfaithful manager. He gets in trouble. Just when you thought you’d get to see him get what’s coming to him, somehow he just manages to coast through it all! There are any number of terrible sermons you could preach from a text like this: Do it to them before they can do it to you! That’s not the lesson Christ wants to teach us. Do nice things to buy your way to heaven: that’s not it; that’s a terrible sermon, and completely wrong.

But think: what does He mean, and what does He bring home to our hearts? He uses humor and unexpected twists and turns that bring us along with Him! There’s a rule of Biblical interpretation that might help us: *Find the point of comparison*. Let’s start there. "**There was a rich man who had a manager**. Who is that Rich Man? God. Who is His manager? Adam; mankind; finally, it’s me. It’s you. It’s us.

*For the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it*. We are put in charge of what belongs to God. But then we read: **Charges were brought to [the Master] that this man was wasting his possessions. 2 And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'** This changes everything. He hears what the Master says, and even if it’s for the first time, he believes, three things:

1) Everything belongs to the Lord;

2) I have to give account;

3) The time I have to live as a manager here is running out!

Why didn’t the Master fire him on the spot?! Why does he still have the books?! It’s crazy. You see? Because of outrageous grace, God leaves His possessions in the hands of sinners. The Land is Mine~You Are Strangers, and My Guests it says in Lev. 25.23. That information changes everything. The steward asks **What shall I do?** What a good question. Like the crowds that once went out to hear John the Baptist. What a searching, careful question. Not a question you keep working at until you get the answer *you wanted.* Not a question to consider *without* looking to God’s Word for guidance—even if you prayed on it! Did you ever give thanks for the food and stuff yourself sick? You didn’t curb yourself with the question: **What shall I do**?

That’s the question that drives the *unjust steward*: he doesn’t give up till he finds the answer! Because **the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the sons of light**. Finally: **I know what I’ll do!** It’s brilliant. He gathered his master’s debtors. He thinks: I’m about to get fired. But I’ve still got the books. So sit down, take what you owe my master, cut it in half! I’ll save you tens of thousands. You take care of me, and I’ll take care of you. Like you are focused according to sinful selfishness at work in you! If there are 6 of us and 7 pieces of pie, you’ll pound your piece to get the one that’s left! This is how sin operates:

 You treat things as if they are yours, not the Master’s;

 You act as if there is no accounting.

You seem to think this arrangement will last forever ~ even when you know better!

This life in us is mortal and this age is coming to an end. Now, the manager gets it! He was focused & consistent and absolutely committed! You see? Then if we are not so committed because we are conflicted between faith and sin at work in us… If we are not so whole-hearted because we are weak and unwise and not shrewd…

At least we can look to our Lord’s words and say: Lord you are right! Time was your gift to spend in your Word and with my family and in willing service. I wasted it. Talent was your gift to serve your glory and cheer others. I spent it selfishly. All this wealth was yours to show your kindness and draw hearts to your word but I hoarded it.

Had I seen it all for what it really was I’d be in your house continually. I would have been generous with what was yours. I would have given without worry and without regret. I should have done those things. I didn’t. Lord, you are right.

Then you will find out how wonderfully conciliatory He really is. How ready He is to reconcile and give back to you and commend you! He stepped into the accounting. He was called to account Himself for all our sins. His perfect selflessness sets things right like they haven’t been since the beginning!

How complete was His focus and perfect attention and devotion. How wonderful His undivided heart and mind, set on the Father’s glory and our help! How profoundly He loved God in Heaven, and us earthly thieves: He spent everything, to give us our safe and happy place to land, in His Kingdom: where all is forgiven.

Coming back to the parable, don’t miss it that the Master commended the dishonest manager. The man got away with it because he traded on the generosity and good name of the master. He won’t charge debts again once they are cancelled! He will be gracious! He’ll honor the kindness the shrewd manager shows! You see?

According to the Law, we’re fired. Who isn’t? According to grace we still have His stuff! According to grace, we trade on His Name: banking on it, that He is merciful; He forgives; His loving kindness and tender mercies and good name are ours to put to work!

In the Reckoning that comes at the last day, Jesus is the Lord, Judge, Maker, and King! He is also the Poor One that we befriended when we believed His words. He is the One who accepts by grace the things He himself does through us! He is the One who welcomes us in. Until That Day, the peace of God which passes all understanding, etc. –Amen. SDG