

The Faithful Unjust Steward

Luke 16:1-9

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity, August 18, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

I have read this parable my whole life and never understood it. Do you have this problem? Do you understand what our Lord is talking about? Why doesn't the master of the unjust steward call the police and have him arrested? Why does the master praise the unjust steward for his shrewdness? Why would the master's debtors welcome an unjust steward into their homes? Why wouldn't they call the police? And why on earth does your Lord direct you to use the money of unrighteousness in order to make friends for yourself so that when it is gone you are welcomed into eternal dwellings? Why would God welcome a bunch of people into the eternal dwellings who used money unrighteously?

I have said this before and I am sure that I will say it again. Some things just have to be explained.

First of all, the master hears an accusation against his steward that the steward is squandering the master's money. Since everyone in our Lord's parable acts as if the accusation is true, I think it is safe to assume that the accusation is true. The steward in the parable actually is unjust.

Second, the steward is guilty of squandering the master's money. This is the exact same thing of which the prodigal son is guilty in the parable of the prodigal son. And the parable of the prodigal son is the parable that our Lord tells immediately before telling the parable about this unjust steward. Now that is important.

Our Lord has just told the parable about the man with two sons. The younger son demands his share of the estate before his father is dead. He takes his share and squanders it in another country in wild living. A famine hits the country and he begins to be in need. A farmer hires him to feed pigs. He comes to his senses and decides to return to his father and tell his father that he has sinned against heaven and against his father. He is no longer worthy to be called his father's son. He plans to request of his father that he become one of his father's hired men. When he returns home his father sees him from a distance and runs to meet and embrace him. He kills the fattened calf for his son and starts a celebration because of his return. The older son is upset and when the father tries to calm the older son down about his younger brother's return the father tells the older son, "Your brother was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found." Our Lord pauses only to take a breath and then immediately launches into this

parable of the unjust steward where like the prodigal son, the unjust steward is guilty of squandering the master's money. They are guilty of the same thing.

Third, our Lord never tells us whether or not the plan of the unjust steward works. The unjust steward tells us that he wants to be welcomed into people's homes. He tells us that he is not strong enough to dig and he is ashamed to beg. That is a white collar worker about to be fired not wanting to do blue collar labor. He executes this scheme to change the bills of his master's debtors. The master praises the unjust steward for his shrewdness, but then the Lord does not tell us anything more.

I think it is safe to assume that the scheme worked. The prodigal son was guilty of squandering his father's estate and the father welcomes him back. The unjust steward therefore being guilty of the same sin and receiving the praise of his master for his shrewdness is welcomed back into the master's employ. He does not have to beg. He does not have to dig.

Fourth, the unjust steward is not immediately fired. The master calls him in and tells him, "I have received a report about you. Turn in your books. You cannot be steward any more." Before he is out of work the steward must turn in the books. Before he turns in the books, he changes the bills of his master's debtors. This is an extremely important point. He is still the master's steward when he changes the bills.

Fifth, and this is the most important point of all in order to understand the parable, that means that the master's debtors assume that the steward is acting on the master's authority when he changes the bills.

This is the part that has always eluded me. Maybe it has eluded you as well. When the steward goes to the first debtor and asks him, "How much do you owe my master?" And he says, "A hundred baths of olive oil," and the steward says, "Sit down quickly. Take your bill and write, 'fifty,'" the debtor is assuming that the master of the steward told him to do this. The debtor will not praise the steward for reducing his bill. He has no idea the steward is acting unjustly. The debtor will assume that the master is a gracious master and is reducing his bill.

The same thing is true of the second debtor. He owes the master a hundred cors of wheat. When the steward tells the debtor make his bill eighty, the debtor has no idea that the steward is being dishonest. The debtor assumes that the master told the steward to do this. The debtor will not praise the steward for reducing his bill. He will praise the master for reducing the bill.

And here is the cool part. When you decode the parable the master is obviously God. God does not merely want to look gracious and generous. He is gracious and generous. So if the master fires the unjust steward it will be revealed that the master had not reduced their bills at all and that the master is not gracious and merciful, but

rather demands what is owed to him. The master does not wish to appear as someone who is not gracious and generous. Rather he wants to appear gracious and generous and so He is gracious and generous to the steward and does not fire the steward, but keeps him on as steward. It is even possible that the master benefits in trade from this because he will have acquired the reputation of a gracious and generous master!

The steward is counting on the fact that the master is gracious and generous. The steward has faith!

Ok. So what does it mean at the end when our Lord says, "So use money of unrighteousness in order to make friends for yourselves so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal dwellings"?

In this statement your Lord is not talking about actual money. If you read the verses following, our Lord says things like this, "Anyone who is unfaithful in little will also be unfaithful in much. Anyone who is faithful with little will also be faithful with much. If you have been unfaithful with that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? You cannot serve two masters. You will either love the one and hate the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." When our Lord talks about the inability of a person to serve God and money, He is talking about real money. The reason that our Lord makes those remarks is so that you do not misunderstand his remark about money of unrighteousness. Your Lord is not advocating that you have dishonest dealings.

So what is He advocating? Our Lord is still speaking in terms of the parable when He says, "So use money of unrighteousness in order to make friends for yourselves so that when it is gone you may be welcomed into eternal dwellings." When I say that your Lord is still speaking in terms of the parable what I am saying is that the money of unrighteousness about which the Lord is speaking is the reduction of the debt of the master's debtors. That is the money of unrighteousness. Thus the money of unrighteousness is the master's generosity!

Use the master's generosity to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal dwellings. What is the master's generosity? It is His grace and mercy. It is the grace and mercy of God! Use the grace and mercy of God to make friends for yourselves. Dole out His forgiveness to other people! Do they deserve to have their debts canceled before God? No! Reduce their debt anyway. Land sakes, why not go the whole way and cancel their debt altogether. Go around forgiving people's sins in the name of Jesus. It will make the Master look gracious and generous and He is!

When you do this you will put God into the position where if He casts you into hell, it will look like He does not like people who tell others that He is forgiving. But He is a God who is gracious and generous. He is a God who cancels debts for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ! He wants to be known as that kind of God because that is the kind of God that He is! So when you forgive in His name. When you tell others their debt is canceled in His name, He will not cast such a one into hell. You have made the Master look good in the Master's eyes. You have made the Master look exactly the way that He is. And since the Master is a Master who cancels debts, then He will cancel yours as well.

You may count on His mercy because the Master is mercy.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.