

Do What it Takes

Luke 16:1-15

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 18, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Some basic principles about how our Lord operates when it comes to money.

First of all, there are people who justify themselves and there are people who rely on God's grace. The people who justify themselves rely on their own accomplishments in order to be just. They rely on their own accomplishments to be just in front of God. They rely on their own accomplishments in order to be just in front of other people. While I know that that being just before God and being just before people are two different things, in my experience those who are trying to be just in front of people on the basis of their own accomplishments will also try to be just in front of God on the basis of their own accomplishments. It also works with grace. Those who rely on the grace of God in front of God also rely on the grace of God in front of people. It is like people believe that if they are justified in front of people they will be justified in front of God also. They feel like if they are not justified in front of people, they are not justified in front of God. Not only does this make people the center of anyone's existence rather than God it also deprives a person from being able to stand in front of people on the basis of God's grace.

Now, if a person believes that they are just in front of God only if they are just in front of people, how does one justify oneself in front of people? In other words what does a person have to do in order to be accepted by other people as a good person? The easiest answer and a more common one than we think is to have money.

People love money. They love people who have a lot of money. That is why we put people who have a lot of money on TV. We put them on the front cover of magazines. We watch what people who have a lot of money do and say. We consider that what they say is wise. As Tevye says, "And it won't make one bit of difference if I answer right or wrong. When you're rich they think you really know." That is why when someone is trending online, they are typically rich.

Now some people take this truth and figure that they can justify themselves in front of people. They will try to obtain a lot of money and by doing so obtain justification in the eyes of people. They think that if they are justified in the eyes of people, they will be justified in the eyes of God as well. When they try to be justified before God by being wealthy they are not justified before God by His grace and we all know that if you are not justified before God by His grace, you are not justified before God at all.

Wealthy people often have this peculiar notion that if I am all right with people, I am all right with God. And it is their wealth that keeps them all right with people. The problem of course is that God knows the heart. What is a high thing among people is an abomination in the sight of God. And there it is. Justifying yourself in front of God with money is an abomination.

The reason justifying yourself is an abomination is simple. You cannot serve God and money. The two are mutually exclusive when it comes to service.

There are numerous things in life that we serve. Some people we serve because God has commanded us to serve them. God has commanded us to serve our spouse for example. That means that serving our spouse is serving God because God has commanded us to serve our spouse. God has commanded you to serve your children. He gives you the necessary authority in order to do this. Since God has commanded you to serve your children, when you do serve your children you are serving God. The same can be said of your employer, the government, your neighbor, etc. Since God never commands you to serve money, when you serve money you are not serving Him. Money is a tool like a hammer or a

tractor. It serves a purpose for a time and when its purpose is served, it should be discarded. There things that money can do and things that money cannot do. The right tool should be used for the right job. The purpose of money is to make friends for yourselves so that when the money is gone you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The money will, of course, eventually be gone so it should be used now in order to be welcomed into eternal dwellings. If it is not used, if it is kept, then you will wind up serving it and when you wind up serving it, you are by definition not serving God. Or don't you believe your Lord when He says, "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and disregard the other. You cannot serve God and money."

Thirdly, our Lord points out what should be obvious. If you are trustworthy with a very little, you will also be trustworthy with much. If you are dishonest with a very little, you will also be dishonest with much. That much is sound. But then the Lord goes on, if you are not trustworthy with unrighteous money, who will give you true riches? If you are not trustworthy with someone else's things, who will give you the things of your own?

Why does He talk about the money of unrighteousness? What is the money of unrighteousness? Whatever it is, if you are trustworthy with it, you will receive true riches. The only money of unrighteousness that our Lord could possibly mean is the money of unrighteousness that the unrighteous manager managed.

Now pay attention to the parable closely. It is hard to understand. The unrighteous manager is going to lose his position. He has no other alternatives to which he may turn. He can't dig and he's ashamed to beg. He has to do something in order that people will receive him into their homes. Before he is dismissed completely from his duties he tells his master's debtors to reduce the amount of the bills that they owe to their master. One owes a hundred baths of olive oil. He tells that guy to make his bill say fifty. He tells another debtor who owes the master 100 bushels of wheat to make the debt 80. Whatever you think about this you have to think that the manger is cheating his master for his what is due to the master. He is cheating his master by having his master's debtors alter the paperwork to show that they owe less than they really do. The manager gets away with this because it is his authority to indicate to the debtors how much is owed. No wonder he is getting fired! The manger is in essence stealing from his master and doing so for his own gain. He is hoping that his master's debtors will be so happy with him for reducing their bills that they will welcome him into their homes.

The Lord never tells us whether or not this takes place. What He does tell us is that the master was impressed with the dishonest manager's dealings. He can see what the dishonest manager was up to and found it to be shrewd. But when that is the only option that you have you do what it takes to live.

Perhaps some of you do not understand how the master could take that attitude. How can the master admire a person who is cheating him out of sizeable portions of money? The master is like the owner of a house in Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegone who on November 1 goes out of his house in the morning to find that his small car has been dismantled by hoodlums on Halloween night and reassembled on top of his garage. The car owner will, of course, have to call the authorities and make a police report and press charges against whoever did this to his car, but before he calls the police he stands in his driveway looking at the car and in spite of the fact that this is going to be a big inconvenience to get it down and he will wind up paying money out of his pocket to fix everything, he stands there in the driveway and admires the ingenuity of the people who got his car on top of his garage.

That is the attitude of the master of the manager who cheated him out of money so that the manager would be welcomed into the homes of the people whose bills he reduced. But the attitude of the

master is not the point of the parable. Jesus does not mention him further. The point is that the dishonest manager knew what to do when his life was on the line.

The manager had no alternative. It was do something clever or starve to death. He decided to do something clever. And the master laments the fact that the children of the world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of the light. In other words the unbelievers will do what it takes to accomplish their unrighteous goals. Why shouldn't the children of the light do what it takes to accomplish the goal of being welcomed into eternal dwellings? Don't you realize that in addition to calling you to sanctification in justice and mercy Jesus has also called you to be shrewd? He has called you to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. He has called you to do what it takes in order to be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The alternative is hellfire and damnation. When that is the alternative you do what it takes in order to be saved. You do whatever it takes in order to be saved. Nothing else matters.

And even though you are justified by the grace of God, there will be times when you will be called upon to do something shrewd in order to continue to be justified by grace. When that time comes understand that your Lord has called you to be shrewd. If that means giving all of your money away, give it away. If that means giving your life, give your life. If that means running away, run away. Whatever it takes to hang on to the grace of God, do it, or the children of the darkness will be better off than the children of the light.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.