

Luke 16:1-15

How many teenage boys, do you suppose, have ever heard their mother tell them, "Why can't you be more like Jesse James!" Or how many husbands have ever heard their wife say, "Why can't you be more like Osama Bin Laden!" I doubt if such words were ever spoken, or if they were, they were said in a sarcastic, jesting manner. But in Luke 16 Jesus is not joking around when He tells His disciples the story of an unrighteous, dishonest manager, and then says in effect, "You need to be more like him." Before you and I, however, go out and start cheating and stealing, we had better grasp exactly what Jesus means. The point of His parable is not for us to be dishonest as the manager was, but to plan for our future as he planned for his.

He was being fired for wasting his master's possessions, and he was in a tough spot. He would have no income, no place to live. What could he do? He was not strong enough to do manual labor. He was too ashamed to beg. And then it came to him. He was still in charge of his master's books, though not for long. He sat down with each of his master's debtors and he lowered what they owed to his master. He erased debts, not because he was ordered to, but to win friends for himself so that when he had no home, these grateful debtors would take him in and show mercy to him as he had showed mercy to them. Ingenious! That's what his master said when he discovered what he had done. The man was to be commended because he did what he had to do in order to ensure his future.

If Christians were as concerned about their future as this manager was about his, our pews, Bible Classes, and offering plates would be overflowing...really! If the children of light showed the same ambition, the same attitude, the same concern for their future as do the children of the world, every Christian home and congregation would be blessed in ways we can only imagine. But, as Jesus says, it doesn't happen. We Christians are distracted at every turn.

Where is your future? Your future is Jesus Christ, His words of promise, His Holy Sacraments. Your future, and the future of your family, is nothing else than your Lord and Savior. And so He should be, right now, your greatest priority in life. His living Gospel coming to you and to your family is more important than anything else in your life, period.

But somehow we Christians do not understand this. Here, and elsewhere, hearing the proclamation of Christ regularly takes second, third, or fourth place. Things that don't matter as much have a higher priority than receiving the words and sacraments of our Lord. Here, and elsewhere, Christians prioritize their time, and sitting in front of a television screen comes in much higher than sitting in a chair with the Bible, and sitting in a group to study what God says. Here, and elsewhere, Christians spend much more of their money on entertaining themselves than they do to further God's Kingdom with their offerings. If you doubt me, do the math. Compare what you spent on yourself last month--on things you really did not need--with what you gave to help proclaim the Gospel.

We're all guilty...you and me both. Jesus even says so. If only we would pattern ourselves after that unrighteous manager. Think of this...if Jesse James had used all his energy, and ambition, and daringness not to rob banks and trains, but to spread the good news of Christ as a Christian, imagine how Missouri would have been a different place after the Civil War. If Osama Bin Laden was not a devout Muslim, but a confessing Christian, and he used all of his resources to bring people, not to Allah, but to Jesus, think of what a different world it would be.

Jesse James lived to rob, steal, and murder. He tried settling down under an assumed name in Tennessee, but he could not sit still. He was driven to be ambitious. Just as Bin Laden is driven, and

the unrighteous manager was driven. These all in the wrong way, but they were driven because they knew, or know, the time is short.

How much time do you have left on earth? What we need to remember is that our time will run out...not "might," but "will." We are managers of God's possessions for a time. We, too, have wasted His goods, and God calls us to account. When we die we can no longer be managers. In the parable, that man had to act quickly. He did not have the luxury of procrastinating. His time would soon be up. Shouldn't we live as if our time, also, may not be long? That's what Jesus urges. My brother-in-law's boss died suddenly of a heart attack last week at the age of forty. It was unexpected. But Christ was a priority in his life. Although a sad death, therefore, it was not a tragic death. If your priority has not been Jesus Christ and your future in Him for you and your family, now is the time to repent. Repent with me. We have not been good managers of our time and possessions. We have been wasteful, and our time as managers will soon be up...sooner than we may think.

Now to this point in the sermon you have heard the Law. And we need to hear it because we have behaved poorly as managers of God's gifts. But the Gospel in our text is this: Jesus, for your sake, became that unrighteous manager. He became your Substitute. He took your place under the Law. Whatever wasteful thing you have done is charged to Jesus. And He knew His time was short, so He acted just as that dishonest manager acted. He took the debts of all that were owed to His Father and He cancelled them. To you, who has a debt of sin too great to pay, and to you, and to you...Jesus says, "Sit down quickly and write 'forgiven.'" It doesn't matter how big your debt is. It doesn't matter how often you have sinned against God or your neighbor, or how great and wicked are your sins. Jesus writes "forgiven" across your debt. And He writes it in blood. On the cross He died for you. His Father sees His Son's sacrifice, and out of mercy He must agree that there is nothing more required for you. Jesus paid your debt in full. You are forgiven.

This is the Gospel for you to believe right now. And it's not too late for you to believe it. God is giving you this good news today so that you may live in Christ, confident about your future. And as you come up here to God's altar today, as the unjust manager used things like oil and wheat to win friends for himself, so Jesus uses wheat and wine to win you for Himself, for in such things He gives Himself to you.

Leave here today refreshed, having confessed your sins, you have been forgiven, you have received Christ in Word and Sacrament. Leave with God's Spirit working in you to live more and more like the unrighteous manager--not, of course, living unjustly, but planning for your future in heaven day by day with Jesus Christ at the center of your life. And when that day comes, whether it's soon, or some years from now, you will have no regrets because your life was, and is, all about Jesus. Amen.