

***Making Use of What Fails for What Lasts***

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

August 6, 2023

Luke 16:1–9

The holy Christian Church is the Church of every time and place. And that includes this place and the time that we live in. We are the people of God who gather in this place. God's people gather all across the globe just as they have throughout the ages. Particularly at the altar of the Lord in celebrating His holy Supper we also are gathering with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. The holy Christian Church isn't a building or a corporation or a club. It is the actual people of God who live in various places around the globe and who have lived throughout history.

We are meant to be together just as we are meant to be with God. Many people think that you can be just fine on your own. But without God you will not live forever. You will endure eternal torment and anguish and it will be very lonely and excruciating. We may think we can live a Christian life on our own but without gathering with our brothers and sisters in Christ around the preaching of the Word of God and the Holy Communion at the Lord's table we will wither and die, ultimately separated from the eternal holy communion of the heavenly Feast.

We need each other here and we need each other in our daily lives. Jesus brings this out in today's Gospel reading. His parable sounds strange, though, doesn't it? It may seem cryptic but we can understand it because this is not the first time He speaks of the things of this world and our own possessions. Nothing we own is really our own. It is all from God. Nothing of this earth likewise is from ourselves. Everything that exists and everything we have is all from Him, a gracious gift that He gives. The Catechism expresses that He richly and daily provides all that we need to support this body and life and that all we have is only out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness on our own.

These are the things Jesus is speaking of in His parable today. They are the things of this world. These things are good, God has created them. They are the things of our daily lives that we live on. The manager in the parable was wasting his master's possessions and got fired. What would he do? He knew he wasn't cut out for manual labor and he was horrified at the prospect of begging. His ingenious plan was to quickly settle the accounts of those who owed his master money. He drastically reduced their debts in the hopes that when he was out on the streets they would welcome him into their homes. The master recognized his manager's action for what it was, ingenious. Jesus says that the people of this world are shrewd in that way. They know how to work the system so that they won't end up out in the cold.

But now things get really interesting. Jesus says that we should learn from this shrewd manager by making use of the things of this world to make friends for ourselves. We might expect Jesus to have warned us to not be like those of this world. But what Jesus is teaching us here fits right in with His teaching elsewhere on money and possessions, that we should not use what we have only for ourselves. We should use them also to help others in need. When we do so we will be making friends for ourselves, those who are the recipients of our generosity will be grateful to us.

Thus we help our brothers and sisters in Christ when they are in need. We also help those who do not know Christ and we pray that they too would come to know Him. In this way, when we die and the things of this world are no longer with us, we will be welcomed into the eternal dwellings of God. It will be a great day when Christ comes again in glory and we enter into the eternal glory of God and we are once again with all our friends in Christ.

For now, we are on this earth for a short time. God's eternal Kingdom is the only thing that lasts. The things of this world do not. And yet, so often we get caught up in the things of this world. We hunger and thirst for money and possessions and physical security rather than hungering and thirsting for the Gospel and the forgiveness of our sins. Of course, we do need the things of this world. That is why God has given them to us. But He has given them to us for this life, not for eternity.

We need the things that will last in order to be in eternal glory with God. But Jesus shows us an amazing thing about the temporal blessings God gives us. They actually have greater value than just their temporal benefit. Because we can use them for the eternal benefit of others!

How do we do this? We need look no further than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is eternal. Yet He entered into this temporal existence. He became a man. He used the things of this world not simply to live but also for others. He used the things of this world to serve others and help them.

But the chief way He did this was with His very own body, His very own life. He gave His life over into death so that we may live forever! And even this, His sacrifice on the cross, wasn't the only thing He used to save us. He in fact took the things of this world and brought about in them an ongoing way to love us and serve us and help us in our need.

One thing He used was water. It is so simple. And yet so powerful! We need water in this life to exist. The water He has combined with His word in our Baptism gives us new and eternal life, the forgiveness of sins. He used also bread and wine. Simple, ordinary things. Each of us every day uses simple food items to enjoy but also to stay alive and be in good health. Jesus used ordinary food items to bring to us Himself, His very body conceived in the womb of Mary and the very blood which flowed through His veins. In the holy Supper He instituted He gives to us this body and blood which He also gave over into death and shed on the cross.

Our Lord in these ways serves and helps and loves and strengthens us. He does this for us, because we need it. But He doesn't do this just for each of us ourselves. He also does this for us because others need it. We are given new life in Baptism so that we may love and serve others. We are fed and strengthened in the Lord's Supper so that we may be there for others in their need. He has blessed us in Baptism and strengthens us at His altar so that we do not merely live for ourselves. Not just using what we own for ourselves. We use our lives and our possessions for others—to love them, serve them, help them, and bring Christ to them. We need each other. Christ has come to us here in this life so that we will dwell forever with the angels and archangels and all the saints who have gone before us in the eternal kingdom. Amen.

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