**Luke 16:1-15 September 18, 2022 (Stewardship Sunday)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 16 here re-reading these words. “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Stewardship Sunday may be feared because you think that all I’m going to do is stand up here today in the pulpit and talk to you about money. And every other Stewardship Sunday that I have been blessed to preach I have made sure to reference the stewardship of our time, the stewardship of our talents, the use of our gifts in the various vocations of our lives in which God has called us and I’ve made it abundantly clear that stewardship is not only about money! I have pushed back at the notion that all I, as a pastor am here to talk to you about on Stewardship Sunday is money. Well, today, we’re going to talk about money.

How could we not? Luke chapter 16 is all about the dishonest manager who has been charged with the management of his master’s possessions, and in the management of them it would include buying and selling. How could we not talk about money, when you just heard in verse 13, a summary statement for the relationship between God and money. “You cannot serve God and money.” Money is necessary, but also dangerous. We can’t be free of money, there’s no life without money. It is engrained in our society that there must be some form of currency for goods and services, so you can’t just swear off of all forms of money and payment. As enticing as it may sound for some to go off and live in the woods, living off the land, making no money, spending no money, and living away from people, that also is not the life of a Christian, and not being a proper steward. We are called to be in the world, and the world revolves around money. Money and possessions are closely linked, what is the point of money if you couldn’t buy things with it? The Greek Word here is really what is understood as “mammon” which is not just exclusively money but a love of mammon is a love of all that comes with the joys of the world. Mammon is found in extravagance, money, cars, boats, houses, clothes, and all the other things that we measure wealth with. To love money is ultimately a love of self, it’s the First Commandment on full display, You cannot serve God and money, you shall not have any other Gods. You shall not fear, love, or trust in anything more than the one true, Almighty God, which includes money, and ultimately yourself, because money can’t buy happiness, not a lasting happiness, not an eternal happiness, but it can rent a whole lot of it here on Earth. And we want to be happy in our lives, as a matter of fact we want to be the happiest, and we want to be comfortable. So we chase after money, and we love money, and we serve money, to the detriment of our souls, and our faith, and to show how are unfaithful stewards of what God has given us.

Martin Luther, when speaking about the world and its relationship to money gave this quote in one of his sermons. Tell me if this doesn’t sound like the world we live in today, even though it was written over 500 years ago. “Nowadays one sees a scrambling after riches from the lowliest station up to the highest, even among those who want to be called Christians. It is a sin and a shame to hear this. Nearly everybody falls into this shameful avarice. But such behavior may well be called a life of swine. For the strongest hog at the trough pushes the others away, as though it wanted to devour everything alone. Just so things go on in the world of today. Everybody goes his way in security and not only gives nothing but takes whatever he can possibly get.” The word avarice isn’t used very often, but it’s meaning fits perfectly into what Martin Luther is saying. Avarice means, “Extreme greed for wealth or material gain.” Avarice is serving money rather than God. Martin Luther wrote these words in a sermon based on the text from Luke chapter 6 where we find these words, “Judge not, and you will not be judged, condemn not, and you will not be condemned, forgive and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you.” The words of Jesus, speaking of giving and of proper stewardship, and the words of Martin Luther, speaking about our society, described like a bunch of pigs fighting their way to the trough, not thinking of anyone but itself and wishing to gorge itself on as much as it can possibly get without any thought of anyone else. That is the life lived for money, it is the service that Jesus speaks about in our Gospel lesson, the love of money is like drinking salt water, there is no quenching the thirst, there is no getting enough, there is no satisfaction. There is always a need for more because there is always better, and you can’t ever have the best. Love of money is love of self, love of fame, love of vanities piled on top of vanities, piled on top of vanities. And no one will tell you it’s wrong. Greed is good after all, or so it's been said since the 80s, and way before just maybe not out loud. Greed has gone from a vice to something to be admired, the Greed and craftiness of those who would have accumulated so much for themselves, and who won’t give a dime of it back to God.

Craftiness, that’s what the manager is in our Gospel lesson. A man who knows he’s in trouble. The management of his master is going to be taken from him, so he turns from only caring about the money and possessions, to caring about the people. He is crafty in using wealth in relationships. What a concept. What if money wasn’t the only important thing? What if it was a tool? A means to an end? Something that is used for the benefit of my neighbor, rather than just the glorification of myself? Jesus says, “And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into eternal dwellings.” We are called to be stewards of our wealth, there is nothing wrong with money management, our friends from Thrivent are certainly not evil or sinful in helping you out with your finances, you need money, you need it to live, you need it to eat, you need it to take care of those who rely on you, but wealth can’t be everything there is to your life, and the biggest lesson, the biggest takeaway, is that wealth can’t supersede the help you show to your neighbor. Money is a tool, it is a means of helping others, it is a blessing of God, and we must be faithful with it, but it can’t be the thing we love more than God, or more than our neighbor who is in need. For God has given us more than just money in our lives, he has given us something far more valuable. More valuable than our time, or our talents, or our treasures, he has given us life through his Son. A man who came and never owned a house. Never owned land. Is never recorded having rings and jewelry or being adorned in great clothes. A man who went through his life not worrying about money, but instead came to buy us back from death itself. Not with gold or silver, not with a blank check of wealth accumulated by his father, but he gave up his own blood as the ransom price of our sin. He gave us his very life, so that we would not suffer eternally, and justifiably, for our love of the things that he has blessed us with. Martin Luther writes in the explanation of the Second Article of the Creed. Jesus has bought us back, we lost and condemned people, redeemed us, from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil, “Not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death.” Money can’t buy your salvation, no matter how much of it you can accumulate here on Earth. The price of your salvation has been paid in the blood of Jesus Christ, a man poor in the eyes of the world, who gave everything to save those who were lost and condemned on account of their own sins. Your sins are forgiven because of what he did for you.

And we don’t have to buy this forgiveness for a price, I’m not here to sell you forgiveness. The church at one time would sell people indulgences for the forgiveness of their own sins or you could buy an indulgence to forgive the sins of a loved one. I’m not here to sell you an indulgence for the good of the church, that’s not how it works. You don’t have to pay anything. I’m not going to shake you down. I don’t look at the plates when we bring them forward and send them back with the usher if they aren’t full enough of cash and checks. That’s not how it works. The forgiveness you receive is free, your membership here is free, everything is free when it comes to Jesus Christ in the sense of your payment, but it also costs more than you could ever pay in terms of the blood he shed. Your money is a means by which you show your thanksgiving to God for what he has given you, and the truth is he has given you everything: your money, your possessions, even your very life. The salvation of your soul. The faith which believes. The eternal joy that awaits you. Your money is a tool by which you get to be a faithful steward. And to horde it, rather than help others, is to love it, more than you love God. I’m here to tell you today that you punish yourself if you are not a faithful steward because there is peace in knowing that you are returning thanks to God with the money he has given you. The widow who comes and gives 2 pennies doesn’t have a care in the world about the state of the temple and what it’s needs are. She has given what she can, and she goes on with her life. You do not need to fear the financial woes of any congregation that you attend, all you have to do is faithfully give to God. When you know in your heart, that you are giving what you can, and you are a faithful steward of what God has given you, there is no greater peace. Because you don’t have to give anything, no one is going to shake you down for money, it is a private thing between you and God, but it’s not something you have to feel obligated to do, it’s something you get to do. You get to give, and it is a peace to give. It is a joy to give, because in your giving you can see all that God has given to you.

Is Stewardship all about money? No. Not at all. Stewardship is about all of the blessings of God and how you use them. Your time, your talents, your vocations, everything you have comes from God. But we can’t ignore these words. “You cannot serve God and money.” So repent of your love of money. After all, money isn’t the root of all kinds of evil, the love of money is. Love that shows itself through sacrifice for something, and love that we can’t have for anything but God. Repent, and be forgiven, and be at peace when you see what Jesus spent for your salvation, more than money, his very precious blood. And give, give for your own peace of mind, and give out of thanksgiving for all that God has given you. Is it all about money here in the church? No. It's all about Jesus, and it always will be, on Stewardship Sunday and any other where we are blessed to come together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.