**9/18/22**

**Shrewdness Can Go A Long Way**

**Luke 16:1-13**

Last Sunday we were blessed to have Pastor Glenn Schoenberger preside over our Worship Service and bless us with the opportunity to come together at the table once again for Holy Communion. The importance of this gathering is something I know each and every one of us craves every week, and in all due respect I get it. I want that too, and we are working on getting there. However, there is a season we are in right now, and I call all of you to realize that. That discomfort is all too common in our growth as human beings, and our growth as Christians as well. I have been realizing that all the more myself as of late too.

Last week we were reminded that we are the lost sheep that our Shepherd continues to seek out. In that same manner we are actually compared to being the silver coin that the woman had lost and then found. No sheep… No coin… and No person are insignificant! These are just examples of being lost, and even though we don’t want to admit it at times, we sin and we lose focus, and we are lost. However, we are forever reminded that, “God takes the initiative to find sinners, each of whom is so precious to God that their recovery brings joy in heaven.” (1)

Now that we have completed our recap from last week, let us move forward to this week’s Gospel Lesson and teaching points. I pray that we can find a connection between last week’s story and this week’s. I know I initially struggled finding that connection myself. Well, that is until I drew from some of my recent past.

Now, this is one of those rare moments that I will admit to you all here, and even to myself, that I have my weaknesses. Sometimes one of those is that I am not one to quote much of the Bible from common memory, or with any sense of ease. Especially under pressure, or under the so-called microscope that is. However, there is a point and time to grow. There is a point and time to be uncomfortable, and sometimes we realize that as the example of our Manager in the Gospel Lesson today. I will admit yet again I do not always have his tenacity or focus for change, or even his shrewdness. To put this into a little more perspective I can share with you that I was actually scared away from a Stewardship Memory Game that Reverend Dean Brown shared with us at the New Jersey Synod Day at Six Flags two Saturdays ago. After reading and reviewing today’s Gospel Lesson several times I realized I should have stepped up like my wife did and made myself uncomfortable in the means of growth. She actually may not have realized that she taught me a lesson either.

I can use the all too common phrase of Hindsight is 20/20. This indeed refers to the fact that it is now much easier to analyze and evaluate that event after it has happened, and even more so since I have stepped back from it rather than being in the middle of it. Of course I now realize that I should have followed her lead. Even though she admitted to Kathy, Reverend Brown’s Wife, that she actually cheated in some manner to get to the end means of making a match with the cards. Whether Heather realized it or not, her feeling of cheating was only cheating in the context of the common game rules. However, she would have cheated herself, and myself, more by not actually making an effort to learn. More importantly, her act of humility is important here in the context of things too. That very act of humility brings more light to how the Manager tried to decrease debts and make things better in the light of scrutiny or job loss from his employer. He waited to be corrected, or even lose his job, where my wife chose to step up and step out before any life consequences were upon her.

So let’s explore this again outside of the event, or the actual reading of the Gospel Lesson today. Let’s use our hindsight and evaluation here. “In a last desperate attempt the middle manager approaches the boss in the final hours of the day and shares with him how he had gotten these accounts to pay up. In a shocking turn of events, the boss shakes his hand and actually compliments him on his craftiness or shrewdness.” (2)

“Yes, we could stop in the middle of the story, but how do we teach our youth to be honest when this part of the parable seems to commend dishonesty? How do we teach others to be thrifty, hardworking, when the original text up to this point, might seem to some to promote laziness and waste? But it not the end of the story. Is it?” (2)

“Jesus goes on with the parable by saying, “The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with everyday life issues, plotting how to overcome a crisis, than in dealing with eternal life issues. So go ahead make friends for yourselves by means craftiness and shrewd behavior, so that when all is said and done, let these people, these things you rely upon, give you eternal life.” (2)

“We will use our wits, our minds, our imagination to come up with a solution, sometimes even if it crosses the boundaries of shrewd and crafty behavior. If we succeed, guess what? The world commends us.” (2)

“Jesus is calling us to start using more of our wits, our brains, our craftiness, our shrewdness that we use to secure our position on earth, and start using these same gifts to the glory of God.” (2)

We are all encouraged to grow and change each and every day. We are called to be a little less lost like our sheep from last week. We have been found, and we are back in the fold with the other 99, and there is strength in numbers. Through that very strength we can be an example in our daily faith walk and conviction. Through our conviction we can learn and be more like Him. With this we are also reminded to step back and take a look at the bigger picture. Accomplishing things without thinking we need help… Accomplishing things without thinking with a different perspective… Accomplishing things without realizing who we are and whose we are can be very dangerous!!!

It is very easy to see all of the things that we have, the things we have paid for, the things we have made, and even the things that we have had given to us. However, that is exactly where the emphasis is… it is right there!!! The things that we have had given to us!!! Now, I am not speaking here of the physical things. I am speaking in a different manner. We indeed have been granted freedom, grace, forgiveness, and so many things from our Father. However, each and every day we, yes I mean me too, we continue to serve another master. Now, it may only be for a split second, and at other times it may be for an hour, a day, a week, or even longer. That is unfortunate though, and more importantly dangerous. Now… you may ask… Why is that? Well, the explanation is pretty plain and simple I do believe. It is because those distractions are thrown in there to lead us astray, to take us off the beaten path to His love and His desire to have all of us, and not part of us. We cannot and will not serve two masters with the skill or love or focus that we can and desire to serve one. We can’t afford to be lukewarm, and we must realize that we need to be more diligent in our efforts and recognition of the distractions. We need to wave our proverbial stop sign, and then dismiss those things in order to be able to commit and move onward in our constant efforts of love and devotion of our Father. Yes, I do realize that is easier said than done. However, if the road is easy, then maybe that provides us with the simple fact that we probably should not be on it.

I say something to the individuals I serve at work sometimes, and I am quite sure many of you have said this to your children, loved ones, or even yourself at times as well. Your words and your actions don’t line up. Well, this is where God is telling us that they have to. We can be like the Manager in the story and try and make things right. However, we also need to explore why we made them wrong in the first place. More importantly, we need to make sure we do not wait until the final hour.

Yes, we need to learn from our mistakes. In that very learning we also need to learn how not to continue making the same mistakes over and over again, because I am certain that we are all too familiar with the term insanity. That term of mentality is where we don’t desire to be, and that is where we need to be more focused on determining our guilt versus our innocence. Now those are some heavy words right there aren’t they? Guilt versus innocence!!! We are often guilty of not realizing how great our Lord and Savior has made things for us by paving the way and paying our dues by going to the cross. Our continued innocence is what allows us to make mistakes, repent, draw a line in the sand and try and move forward as human beings; and more importantly Christians. This is where I come back to the fact that we must remember who we are by remembering whose we are. We cannot serve God and ourselves…. We cannot serve God and the clothing or shoes or handbags in our closets… We cannot serve God and the money in our bank accounts or mutual funds and stocks… However, we can serve God by remembering the least of these is like serving Him… We can donate our time, talents, and treasures in a way that it will continually impact the Kingdom for the good… We can invite and love and nurture those who need a home in the church… We can help people find their need and hunger for the faith by showing them our Father’s love in our daily actions and service.

I try my best not to preach at you, but to teach. Through that teaching I always hope that I do not offend or upset someone. However, I do say what I say in an intentional fashion because I feel that I am convicted to do so in an effort to make you feel a little less comfortable though. Heck, I even make myself uncomfortable at times too. Now, why is that? Well, it is plain and simple you see. We are Stewards of God’s wealth, His love, His compassion, His finances, His skills, and every and anything else we can or even cannot think of. We were modeled in His image and likeness. We are blessed to have what we have, and sometimes that which we think we don’t have. “Contentment, being a blessing with our blessings, and living a life of service for God and for others is something that is always to be a part of our lives, and not just when we have some extra time or extra money.” (3) We need to shine His light and be a constant beacon of hope for the lost. We need to serve Him, and only Him! Through that very example that we are called to live and model to everyone else then, and only then, we can, yes you and I, be all that He has designed us to be!

 AMEN

**References**

(1) SundaysandSeasons.com

 Looking at Sunday, September 11

 Lectionary 24, Year C

 14th Sunday after Pentecost

(2) Be Shrewd!

 Contributed by David Trexler on Dec 1, 2007

 Scripture: Luke 16:1-13

 Denomination: Lutheran

(3) Management Training Series

 Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Sep 27, 2007

 Scripture: Luke 16:1-13

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Luke 16:1-13**

Jesus tells the curious story of a dishonest manager who cheats his employer and then is commended by him for having acted so shrewdly. Jesus wonders why his own followers are less creative and diligent in their stewardship given that they are managers of a far more valuable household.

1Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. 2So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ 3Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. 4I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ 5So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ 6He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ 7Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’ 8And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. 9And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

10“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. 11If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? 12And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? 13No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”