

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Throughout
these Sundays after Pentecost you've heard a number of parables.

You've
heard, for example, that *Jesus* is the One who rescues you out of the ditch
where you were left for dead (Luke 10:33-35) -

that Jesus is the One
who searches for you like a Shepherd searches for His lost sheep to carry you
safely home (Luke 15:4-6) -

that Jesus is the
One who pays the price for your discipleship, taking up His cross and denying
Himself so that you could have life in His Kingdom (Luke 14:26-33).

And
hopefully, as you become more and more aware of Christ's compassion and His
desire to save all men to Himself,

these parables of grace begin making more sense.

But then comes
today's strange parable about a crooked steward and a system of book-keeping
that just doesn't add up...

Of
course, it DOES add up,

and today's parable
of the "Shrewd Steward" is only puzzling if you insist on coming at it from the Law, trying to figure out who's right, who's wrong, who deserves what, and what YOU must do to be saved.

Because
today's parable is a Grace thing, not a Law thing.

Today's parable is
about what the Master does for YOU, not about what you can do for yourself.

It's a parable about
knowing and trusting your Master and *receiving* His gifts... something that
must happen before you can begin sharing His gifts.

And if you insist on
bringing your own reason and strength to this text,

then you're going to
miss out entirely on what's going on here.

So what
is going on in this strange tale?

Well, as you know,
after Jesus had set His face toward Jerusalem and death to save you from your
sin, He not only had to walk uphill against the terrain,

but He also had to
struggle against the stubborn people who refused to be given to.

You
see, all along the way, Jesus had been on a "grace trip [Capon],"

but folks just wouldn't get on board...

which is why He had
to keep teaching and preaching in every imaginable way to try to bring these
stubborn Law people around to an understanding of the Gospel.

Now,

you may ask, "Couldn't He have made things a little more clear?"

But the fact is, He did!

Jesus
was never vague about the way of salvation.

He made
it clear from the get-go that "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected... and be killed... and on the third day be raised again (Luke 9:22)."

He made it clear that
the way to everlasting life was by way of the cross through death,

and that anybody who
would follow Him to His victory over sin and death must come by way of His
cross –

by way of repentance
and Baptism into the newness of life that would come only by His sacrificial
death and resurrection.

The
problem is, pride and crosses don't mix.

And the more Jesus
tried to show people how dead they were in their sin and how dependent they
were on a Savior,

the
more offended they became.

And
that's because grace – the promise of rescue in the face of complete
helplessness –

is offensive to every
part of our sinful pride that insists that, certainly we can have some control;
certainly, we can do the right thing.

I mean,

let's face it, being called a sinner is kind of hard on the self esteem, right?

And picturing
yourself as a lost and helpless lamb just doesn't fit with the delusion that
you can actually *give your life* to God or *live* for Him by
way of your sheer moral determination.

But the
facts are plain: you're dead... and so am I.

Because of sin, we
are ruined, destroyed, and utterly dependent on Christ alone for salvation –
which
is all Jesus has been trying to get across for 7 chapters now!

He *taught*
about grace every step of the way.

He *demonstrated* grace by His miracles of healing and
giving.

And now He's
painting *word pictures* of grace in parable after parable to show you
this one simple fact: that you are dead, and only He can bring you to life.

And
that's the key to understanding the parables of grace.

Because if you don't find yourself dead in them,
then
you won't find yourself coming to life in them either.

Saving
grace can only come with the awareness of sin that brings about true repentance
–

a turning from your
pride, your self-centered reason, and your works of self-righteousness to
receive the benefits of Christ crucified and risen who alone gives you newness

of life.

So

let's drown your Old Adam, shall we?

Let go of your pride and come dead as you are.

Because when you put

yourself on the receiving end of the Master's gifts, the grace just pours out of today's reading.

Luke

Chapter 16: The story of a household manager who receives everything he has from his master: his clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home ... you get the idea -

The Master represents

God who gives us all things, and the steward or manager is you and me.

Unfortunately,

the steward takes the Master's gifts for granted,

and his stewardship leaves a lot to be desired...

He

squanders his master's stuff, failing to make the best use of those things he's been given responsibility over.

He spends his time

instead making life comfortable for himself, living to please himself...

And when this comes

to the master's attention, that's it... the steward is judged and thrown into the street...

which

is to say, he's dead.

Because

that's what it means to be out of a job, out of a home, and out on the street...

This is the parable's
way of saying that because of sin, he's on his way to death.

With
me so far?

So
what's a guy to do in this situation?

Can he DIG his way back to life? No...

Can
he BEG his way out of trouble? No... the point being,

this guy does not
have any power or ability *within* himself to save himself... Which is to
say,

help
MUST come from the outside.

And the
moment he realizes that, what does he do?

He turns back to the gifts of His master!

By
trusting in the reputation and the mercy of his master, he begins forgiving the
debt of a world that cannot begin to repay what it owes -

And that brings us to the punch-line: The master is
impressed...

He likes to see us
trusting in His gifts and sharing His gifts at His expense and on His account.

Now, if
Jesus was concerned about the Law here,

do you really think
He would end this story by encouraging dishonest behavior? No! Of course not...

Which is why this
story really is not about the unrighteous steward and his business dealings at
all...

It's
about the mercy of the Master!

As
always, it begins by showing us our sin and its consequences – cast out and
dead...

It then shows us our
inability to save ourselves in the midst of those consequences – can't dig,
can't beg...

And finally it shows
us a Master who knows our guilt and rightly condemns us,

but who ultimately
blesses us when we rely on His grace and mercy as our only hope for salvation.

And so,
in the same way that the steward in our parable simply acknowledged his guilt,
admitted his helplessness, and trusted in the mercy of his master,

our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ calls you to acknowledge your sin, to trust in His mercy,

and to recognize
your complete dependence on *Him* for your forgiveness, life and
salvation.

And
there you have it: another parable of grace –

another picture of your Master who takes the hit –

who sacrifices
Himself to pay the price for your sin, that you may come to a better end.

And

when you simply turn back to the gifts He gives –

When you trust in His
grace and mercy, receiving His forgiveness and SHARING His forgiveness –

then

you will indeed be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

In

the name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Luke 16:1-15