

Sunday, September 18, 2022 – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

As we are invited today to consider what it means to be managers (rather than owners) of all that we have, it is crucial to recognize that we are bought with a price. “Christ Jesus, himself human, . . . gave himself a ransom for all.” Apart from the generosity of God we have nothing—we are nothing. By God’s gracious favour we have everything we need.

Prayer of the Day

God among us, we gather in the name of your Son to learn love for one another. Keep our feet from evil paths. Turn our minds to your wisdom and our hearts to the grace revealed in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Jeremiah 8:18--9:1

Jeremiah’s primary task as God’s prophet was to announce the terrible destruction that awaited the people of Judah and Jerusalem because of their sin. In this passage, a grief-stricken Jeremiah anguishes over the sadness of that message and weeps for his people.

¹⁸My joy is gone, grief is upon me,
my heart is sick.

¹⁹Hark, the cry of my poor people
from far and wide in the land:

“Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?”

(“Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,
with their foreign idols?”)

²⁰“The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.”

²¹For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

²²Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?

Why then has the health of my poor people
not been restored?

^{9:1}O that my head were a spring of water,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people!

Psalm 79:1-9

¹O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have profaned your | holy temple;

they have made Jerusalem a | heap of rubble.

²They have given the bodies of your servants as food for the birds | of the air, and the flesh of your faithful ones to the beasts | of the field.

³They have shed their blood like water on every side | of Jerusalem, and there was no one to | bury them.

⁴We have become a reproach | to our neighbors, an object of scorn and derision to | those around us.

⁵How long will you be an- | gry, O LORD?
Will your fury blaze like | fire forever?

⁶Pour out your wrath upon the nations who | have not known you and upon the kingdoms that have not called up- | on your name.

⁷For they have de- | voured Jacob and made his dwell- | ing a ruin.

⁸Remember not our past sins; let your compassion be | swift to meet us; for we have been brought | very low.

⁹Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory | of your name; deliver us and forgive us our sins, | for your name's sake.

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

The pastoral epistles offer insight into how early Christians understood many practical matters, such as church administration and worship. The church's focused prayer for others is an expression of the single-minded passion God has toward us in Jesus.

¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

⁵For

there is one God;

there is also one mediator between God and humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human,

⁶who gave himself a ransom for all

—this was attested at the right time.⁷For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Gospel: 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.”

Prayers of Intercession

As scattered grains of wheat are gathered together into one bread, so let us gather our prayers for the church, those in need, and all of God's good creation, saying "God of grace," and responding, "hear our prayer."

A brief silence.

God our Savior, you keep your church in faith and truth. Accompany those preparing for baptism or affirmation of baptism. Enlighten preachers, teachers, seminarians, and all those who share your good news with the world. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Divine teacher, you instruct your children to be responsible stewards of your creation. Show us how best to care for the earth and its resources, and guide those who work to develop sustainable practices. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Ruler of the nations, you direct those in authority. Give leaders wisdom and compassion so that all may live in peace. Inspire public servants to follow the example of courageous leaders (*especially Dag Hammarskjöld*) and safeguard the dignity of each person. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Helper of the needy, you lift up those who are oppressed. Breathe justice into economic and social systems that perpetuate poverty and hunger. Sustain food ministries, clothing banks, and emergency shelters (*local outreach may be named*). God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Sustainer and giver of life, you bless this congregation with abundance. Instruct us in the proper and faithful use of wealth and resources, that we share generously. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

God of glory, you gather your saints around your throne. Keep us thankful for the witness of those who have gone before us (*especially*), and bring us with them to the heavenly feast that has no end. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Gathered together in the sweet communion of the Holy Spirit, gracious God, we offer these and all our prayers to you; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen.

A reflection for this Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost...

Love or Money?

A rich landowner tells his unsatisfactory manager he's going to fire him. We don't know how long the employee had to clear his desk, but apparently it was long enough to win friends and influence the people who had accounts with his boss. The manager called them in and reduced their debt. When the boss heard about it, for some reason he didn't call his lawyer but sat back and laughed in admiration.

How could Jesus tell a story where the main character is a crook? Why did the boss commend the bad manager? What is Jesus trying to tell us? This parable can be difficult for us to interpret. One possibility: Dr. Audrey West, in the 2004 Lutheran Woman Today Bible study, described a parable as a story about something ordinary, with a surprise or twist that leads us to experience reality in a new way, so that it may even transform our daily living. The surprise in this parable is not the manager's self-serving behavior, as we've seen for ourselves in some corporate accounting scandals in the news. The surprise is the boss showing mercy.

Does this boss remind you of someone? Maybe the landowner in another parable who pays a full day's wage to farm workers who spent barely one hour in the vineyard? The father running out to welcome a shamed and destitute, long-lost son? Or someone who's been in the news lately? Is there any way that he reminds you of God?

In God's economy, people matter more than profits. The prophet (first reading), the psalmist, and Jesus, telling the parable, agree on this. The epistle writer adds a prayer for "a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" for everyone, boss and beggar alike.

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