

The Final Judgement

Sermon for the Second to Last Sunday of the Church Year

Sermon Text: Luke 16:1-9



He

also said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ ³ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ ⁵ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty,’ ⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ ⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹ And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Winter is coming. And the dead leaves that fall from the trees remind us of the end of life. And so, the end of the church year also reminds us that our life must also come to end like the many leaves in autumn. By the way, this is a topic that appears all over in the Bible. Jesus also continually reminds us about the end of our lives and the judgement of the world. Just as we heard in today’s Gospel reading.

Psalm 90 also reminds us: "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Yes, it is wise to think about life's end. Jesus also wants to tell us that with today's parable. I must say right away: This parable is often misunderstood. The parable does not tell us how we should do business in this world. And Jesus doesn't want to praise all real estate agents who write off back rent for their own benefit. He doesn't praise the manager for illegally crediting debtors at the expense of his master. No, Jesus just uses the example of a failed and guilty businessman and shows us that his foresight of the coming judgement was wise. And as wise as this unjust real estate agent was, we too can be wise about the coming judgement of God. This man was wise because he understood very well that he was guilty. There was no loophole for him. He understood that. That's why he was wise. Secondly, he was also clever because he knew exactly what to do in this situation. He didn't want to go out on the street and beg. Therefore, he made provision. He secured his future so that he wouldn't end up on the street. And Jesus picks out only this clever pondering and bargaining of the unjust manager and tells us: this is how you ought to be. You should be wise and not foolish. It would have been foolish if the manager, knowing full well that he was guilty, had done nothing. He would have simply waited for the inevitable day of reckoning and taken what he had coming. That is foolish because the judgement is coming. Jesus wants to tell us that just like this unjust manager waits for the settlement of his master, we too await the final judgement. At that time, we will all stand guilty before God. There is no avoiding it. And He continues to tell us that we have absolutely no chance of justifying ourselves in any way before God's judgement or placing the little credits that we may have hidden under our bed on the table as reparation for our innumerable sins. Whoever tries to do that is not wise, but foolish. I think it is worth thinking about the topic of God's judgement a little while longer. It's worth it because most people don't have God's judgement in mind but would much rather compare themselves with other people rather than with God. Of course, we always find people who are worse than ourselves. But when we stand before the judgement seat of God, the evil deeds of others don't matter. We stand before God's judgement alone. What others have done wrong makes absolutely no difference. The only thing that counts before God's judgement is what we alone did or failed to do. Only the things I myself have done come under the microscope. And if we are honest with each other, we will all find those places in our lives where we have not lived as we had wanted to. Why can't I do what I actually wanted? We consistently experience the limits in our lives. And we experience these limits the most when it comes to love. We suffer because we can't love others. We especially can't love God as we would like. And when those things that we really want fall apart, it hurts. That's why so many people who stand before the shattered pieces of their own lives. Some didn't experience much love as children and now want to do better. But they run into a concrete wall. And they just can't do it. We human beings can't do it!

Jesus knows our need. He knows exactly about our human limits. And given our total failure, Jesus could have done one of two things. He could have come as the just manager and destroyed us. "See, you can't do it. You are broke! And besides that, you have absolutely no hope of ever getting out of this misery. So, away with you! I don't want to have anything more to do with you!" Jesus could have said that. On the other hand, He could also have said: "I have discovered thousands of mistakes in your account. Now you must work twice as hard to correct these mistakes and not get into trouble again. And then, if you really try hard, God might forgive this or that mistake, or perhaps turn a blind eye if you can't do it...." No, Jesus doesn't do that. Precisely in showing us how extremely guilty we are, He is being gracious! Jesus knows how bad things are for mankind. That's why He came, because He knows that! Jesus knows that no one can come to God. He knows that no one can become righteous. He also knows that no one can love God with their whole heart or love their neighbors as they ought. And that's exactly

why Jesus shows us this radical parable. With this, He wants to tell us: People, you can no longer make yourselves righteous before God. You are broke! You must look for another way or you will perish in the judgement! Jesus wants to help us so that we are honest with ourselves and honest with God. The radical judgement that stands before us shows us that we shouldn't try to make any effort to make ourselves somewhat acceptable. Rather, we need only to place ourselves in the light of Jesus. He who is wise is the one who says, I know it, and I admit it: I can't do it anymore. Today, many people say that it isn't good to think about your own mistakes. They say that then you must always walk around with a guilty conscience. And someone who has a guilty conscience can't be a very good person. Jesus doesn't want us to be constantly walking around with a guilty conscience. He doesn't want to make us sad. And that's why He wants to discover with us what God has always wanted. He wants people to be like the first Adam, free from guilt and free from injustice and hate. And we don't find this person hidden deep in our soul. Rather, we find this person in Jesus. Jesus is the one where we find everything! He has promised to pay the entire debt! His righteousness will also pay all my debt! That is liberating! In general, it is liberating when you can be completely honest suddenly. It's even more liberating when we know that it costs us nothing! We can even become what we always wanted to be. We can become these children who are just as God always wanted them to be! We can love! We can be righteous! We can love ourselves; we can love God; we can love our neighbors.

That is such a great gift. Anyone who doesn't want that is truly foolish. Amen.