

September 21, Proper 25

Opening Prayer:

O God
you call us to serve you
above all else.
Give us grace to discern
what you require of us
that, as your faithful stewards,
we might be faithful in managing things
both great and small.
We ask this through him who gave himself
as a ransom for our salvation,
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you, and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amos 8:4-7: *The people had been unfaithful to God, giving lip-service in worship, and they were unfaithful to one another in their business dealings. Worse still is how the powerful used their positions to profit themselves without any care for the needy in their midst. As a result the land was cursed and they lost money. In Scripture God always identifies with those who have no one to rely on but Him.*

The Lord says: Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail,
Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?
That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?
The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.

1 Timothy 2:1-7: *Paul urged his readers to pray for all people, especially for those in power. Christians would not bow down to worship Roman gods, so this was a way to placate the Romans while remaining godly. We also pray for all because it is God's gracious nature to desire that all be saved. Paul again used the example of his life to show that God has a plan of salvation for the whole world.*

I, Paul, I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

Luke 16:1-13: *Both the master of this parable (most likely an absentee landlord) and the manager are shrewd but dishonest businessmen. It was against the Mosaic Law to charge interest, so to get around that, your bill would be inflated if you couldn't pay on time. 50 jugs of olive oil became 100, thus insuring the wealth of the seller and the poverty of the buyer. Jesus urged the building up of heavenly capital by caring for the needy. God sees this faithfulness and entrusts you to the Kingdom (the "true" riches). If you don't, Jesus implied, God won't! The reading ends with the well-known phrase, "you cannot serve God and wealth."*

Jesus said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, how will ye be faithful in the true riches?

And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, how will ye be faithful in that which is your own?

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is.

And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass.

Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?

Humorist Mark Twain quipped, "The lack of money is the root of all evil." Filmmaker Woody Allen noted, "Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons." Jesus said "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." It isn't riches but faith in riches that God judges. Abraham was rich, yet he was faithful. David was rich, yet he was a man after God's own heart. Wealthy people, both men and women, were numbered among the early disciples. It's not riches that are condemned but faith in riches. Money is not the root of all evil. The love of money is the root of all evil. We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Jesus told a parable of a crooked money manager who was wasting his master's possessions. Charges were brought. The man was called in to give an account and fired on the spot, which left him in a bit of a jam. He was unemployed. So what does he do? Before word gets out about his being fired, he quickly calls in the man's debtors and starts discounting loans on the fly. He knocks off fifty percent here, twenty percent there, collecting what he can at deep discount. In other words, he's cashing in on his master's good name and reputation. It's a shrewd move. The master is cornered. If he refuses the deal, he looks bad. If he takes the deal, the crooked money manager looks good and has a lot of friends. The master knew shrewdness when he saw it, and he praised the dishonest manager for it. Seems odd, doesn't it? Making a crook the hero of a parable? Or perhaps not. Think about it. When was the manager most effective at what he was doing? Precisely when he was for all intents and purposes dead. He'd been fired. He had nothing to lose with this "Hail Mary" pass to the end zone. That day may easily have been the most productive day that money manager ever had. If he'd worked that hard earlier, he might never have been fired. But it's only when he is fired, when he doesn't have a single thing to justify himself, that he's free to make friends with someone else's money. He lived as one who was dead, as someone who had nothing to lose. That's when we are truly free, when we have nothing to lose. That's what faithfulness is about.

The mere talk of giving it all away causes us to tense up and reach protectively for our wallets, "the most sensitive organ of the human body."

You can't serve two masters. Divided loyalty is no loyalty at all. The old self will choose Mammon over the Lord every day of the week, including Sundays and holy days. If we were left to our own devices and shrewdness, none of us, not one, would be saved. We'd all be like the rich young ruler who turned his back on Jesus when he heard he needed to downsize, sell all his stuff and come die and rise with

Jesus. The way of salvation is exceedingly narrow. It doesn't allow room for your stuff.

You cannot serve God and money. You simply cannot. It is not possible for you to serve wealth because you are in Christ. You have been freed of such slavery to idolatry. Money now is a means to an end. God is the end and Christ is your master. That's freedom, my friends. Freedom to enjoy, to take risks, to give generously, to live. You're dead to seeing your and other people's value in wealth, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. The nice thing about being dead to that way is that you have nothing to lose. The kingdom remains ours. Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Concluding Prayers

Let us pray for Charles our king, and all leaders of the world's nations, that they may be just and honourable in their dealings with one another.

Let us pray for peace, a reduction of arms, and an end to war and terrorism. Let us pray that the church and its leaders may be ingenious and tireless in preaching the good news.

Let us pray that all Christians may hold their goods and money lightly and use them for the sake of God's Kingdom.

Let us pray that employees and employers may act honestly in their workplaces and treat one another with dignity,

Let us pray for the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the jobless.

Let us pray that the wealthy and those with no material want may use their bounty in keeping with their calling, To the banquet of your kingdom.

Rich in mercy are you, O God,
a wealth of love for your people.
Show us the treasure that endures.
When we are tempted to greed,
renew our memory of your lavish mercy.
Call us back into your service
and make us worthy to be entrusted
with the wealth that never fails.

Grant this through your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

For our Parish.

O GOD the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful: Sanctify this parish by thine abiding presence. Enlighten the minds of thy people more and more with the light of the everlasting Gospel. Bring erring souls to the knowledge of God our Saviour; and those who are walking in the way of life, keep steadfast unto the end. Give patience to the sick and afflicted, and renew them in body and soul. Guard from forgetfulness of thee those who are strong and prosperous. Increase in us thy manifold gifts of grace, and make us all to be fruitful in good works; O blessed Spirit, whom with the Father and the Son together we worship and glorify, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

THE peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord:
And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always. *Amen*