



Luke 16:1-13

Sermon

St. Michael Lutheran Church

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“Long Term Investments”

Who will entrust to you the true riches?

Possessions. Investments. Financial Security. Is that the definition of wealth? How many of us would consider ourselves truly rich or wealthy?

As a society we often define true riches as the Franklin's, Grant's and Jackson's we have in our wallet. Or the collection of diamonds, pearls or silver we possess. Or the stocks and bonds we've secured in our name. The world in which we live narrowly defines rich and poor by a dollar sign. But as Christians we are called to know and live by a different reality.

I grew up in the sprawling metropolis of Irmo, South Carolina, a growing suburb of Columbia. Our modest brick house was positioned in front of a cul-de-sac and right across the street lived our good neighbor Mr. Taylor. Mr. Taylor was a happily retired Methodist minister. He could well be described as a petite, humble, gray haired man, with the sweetest blue eyes. Over the years Mr. Taylor and his wife Alice grew to be like part of our family. We celebrated holidays together, went out to dinner and visited often. They became mentors and close friends of mine.

Now when I was in middle school I rode the bus home everyday. Not the greatest experience of my life, but an experience none the less. But those are days I will never forget. It never failed, everyday as the bus rounded the corner of my street I could see Mr. Taylor standing at the end of his driveway waving at us. When the bus stopped, all the kids would jump off and run home and I would go to meet Mr. Taylor. We would walk down the driveway to his house and be met by his wife Alice at the door.

Then the three of us would sit at the kitchen table and enjoy a plate of warm chocolate chip cookies while we talked about the day. My parents were always glad to know I was at the Taylor's house. I know it sounds like a commercial for tollhouse, but it's true. They really baked cookies for me everyday after school for two years, waited for me at the end of the driveway and listened to me ramble about middle school life. They cared and they cared enough to invest time in building a deep and abiding relationship with me.

Now before Mr. Taylor died he entrusted to me 2 things: a set of his favorite sermons and this California gold coin. The sermons written on small thin paper are kept in a safe place and this is kept in my jewelry box. Some say it's worth a lot because it's rare and old, but to me it's so much more precious than the dollar price someone could place on it. It's a reminder of the relationship I had with two special people, the time they invested in getting to know a sassy, little middle schooler and what I've learned is the meaning of true riches- an investment in people.

This very small coin serves as a large reminder that true riches and wealth are not defined by possessions, stocks and financial security but by our relationship with God and one another.

Who will entrust to you the true riches?

Today's Gospel lesson from Luke lays it all out. This text touches on the tough issues: money, greed and power. Those things we aren't really comfortable talking about out there and most certainly not in here. I mean if we're being honest, no one really likes to talk about money and especially not in church, right? But this account in

Luke's Gospel puts those challenging and thought provoking questions right up front, out for everyone to hear and see and struggle with faithfully.

Today's Gospel lesson is often confusing and even viewed by some as offensive. It's a lesson that may have us squirming in our seats and scratching our heads in wonder.

But this is clearly a lesson that speaks to the importance of long term investments, the use of power and money, eternal security and the building up of God's kingdom through good stewardship of our resources.

"Give me an accounting of your management..."

In other words, it's time for an audit. Ewww, the word that makes some people's skin crawl; that little 5 letter word that means hours, days, maybe even weeks of tedious seeking, searching and sorting—an account of the management of your resources.

Now we hear the manager in this Gospel story has been squandering the rich man's property, and he's been found out. The rich man is going to audit the books and the manager *will* lose his job. At this point fear and trembling over take the manager. What will I do? How will I survive?

So he decides that in order to survive he must make good with the rich man's debtors, so that when he is in need of a place to stay and food to eat the debtors may welcome him into their homes. And so he calls all the debtors in one by one and reduces what they owe tremendously, and to our surprise the rich man commends the manager for his shrewd business actions.

Jesus said, "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. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"

When the man heard his management of the resources would be audited, he chose to go and diminish the debt of those he had previously stolen from. His intentions may have been to survive but his actions were gracious. He forged new relationships with those in debt, and he made no profit doing it. He lightened the load for those in need and secured for himself a better future.

Jesus said, "For the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light."

This shrewd man who is not a disciple of Christ knows how to invest in a better future by lessening the burden of his neighbors, while Christ's disciples continue to struggle with how to faithfully use the generous gifts God has given them.

Investments. Possessions. Financial security. As Disciples of Christ we hear in this Gospel lesson that it is possible to manage money and possessions in ways that are appropriate to life in the kingdom of God. And it's good to talk about it. As Disciples of we are called to manage today's nickels and dimes so that we may be trusted with the big account. The difference is that today's nickels and dimes are not only the gold and silver money that jingles in our pocket or the offering plate, but rather the relationships we build with the hungry person knocking at our door, or the lonely one sitting right next to us.

The reality of this Gospel lesson is simply that life consists of a series of seemingly small opportunities; opportunities to manage the true riches God has given us- the gifts of a relationship with Him and one another, of love, of grace and of forgiveness. Most of us will not this week write a book, end a war, appoint a cabinet, dine with the queen, unite a nation, or be hired by Donald Trump.

More likely this week will present us no more than an opportunity to give a cup of water or a bag of groceries to someone who is hungry, teach a Sunday school class, write a note to someone sitting alone in the quiet, visit a nursing home and hold the hand of someone who desperately needs a tender touch, share a meal and table fellowship with friends, tell a child a story, go to choir practice, and feed the neighbor's cat. Seemingly small opportunities to manage the true riches God has given us; opportunities to live our lives in response to God's gift of unconditional love; opportunities to be extravagant in our love for God and one another, even if it means going broke, especially because it means we do it in faith.

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much."

The shrewd steward used his wealth and power to prepare for the future- a long term investment. Just think what could and would happen if we as the people of God used all that we have and all that we are to build up the body of Christ in this place? Imagine the amazing things that will happen if we invest ourselves, our time and our money in the future by serving God and one another?

God will entrust to us the true riches.

As Christians we are not called to calculate what is good business—but rather we are called to demonstrate charity and stewardship through love of God and one another, we are called to give ourselves away in love even if it means going broke. And there would be no need for us to fear an audit if everything we do and give is handed out in love.

Often in life it's easy to cheat ourselves, to lie to ourselves about what is really important, to merely see the numbers and the dollars in the right hand column rather than the people and the ministry on the left.

If we were to be audited TODAY for our life's actions, for our management of God's good gifts, we would quickly discover that all we value so much is meaningless; that our true riches are given in relationship with God and one another, in the water, the word, the body and the blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' death on the cross, God sending His only Son to live, die and rise again, so that we may know true love, is the ultimate long term investment. God loves us so much that He invests all He has so that we may have life. As Christians the reality that shapes and forms our lives is that it is not the dollar sign that defines true riches and wealth but rather the Cross of Christ- the most extravagant investment.

Today we will baptize baby Kaelyn, and proclaim the power and reality of God's covenant with her and us through the good and gracious gift of Baptism. We will mark the sign of the cross on her forehead, marking her with the true riches.

And today we will begin a long term investment, as we commit ourselves, our time, our talent and our possessions to raising her up in the Church; building up the body of Christ in this place at St. Michael Lutheran Church through Kaelyn's life of faith formation, through teaching her to be a disciple, which each of us is called to be a part of.

People are more than profits, and ministry is more than money. ***God has entrusted to us the true riches***, His love and grace. He loves, forgives, names and claims us to go out and share those riches with all we meet. May together we invest all that we have and all that we are in growing God's kingdom, faithfully.

Thanks be to God. Amen.