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Sunday's Sermon

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Propers 21 (Pentecost 19) Series C 2016

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Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 25

Trust is said in Latin: *Fiducia*. It is the word from which we get all sorts of terms which bankers and board members have to know like “fiduciary responsibility.” In my first parish, when I thought I could do just about anything, I agreed to serve on the Board of Directors for Salt Lake Lutheran High School. “Sure, I can be vice-President,” I thought. “They don’t do much.” That is until the President resigned from the board. The attorney who served with me and was incredibly helpful to me once told me meant that if I signed the bank note for the Lutheran high school and knew that the school stood a poor chance of paying off the loan, I could be personally responsible for the million dollar note. That certainly makes picking up the pen a more careful event.

When I had been elected to that position, people placed a trust in me. If I did not live up to that trust, I might find some ugly consequences waiting for me. I had to make a good decision.

Today the readings center on trust. As you can see from the Latin term, it is etymologically and conceptually related to faith, or “*fide*.” But faith is not trust; there is not an equal sign between the two concepts. Faith is the relationship which God has established with us. It is like the parents of an adopted infant. They have hired the attorney, they have filed the paper work, and they have entered the room for the first time and taken the child in their arms and brought her home. They have established a relationship with that baby. The baby did not establish herself as their daughter, rather they established themselves as her parents.

But in that relationship, one of the first things that baby will do is trust. When the mother and father consistently hold and nurture her, even before she can articulate a word to them, she will trust them. She will not be frightened to be carried around in her mother’s arms, but will simply trust that mother will not drop her. In truth she will seek out a position which otherwise has to be seen as precarious, held several body lengths above the ground, utterly dependent on the grip of another human being. But she won’t bat an eye at this. When they go on vacation and stay at the motel with a pool, the toddler will hurl herself off the edge into her father’s arms, trusting completely that he will catch her.

We trust God. It is not the relationship itself, but it is one of the first things that the relationship does. We trust.

If you chose to use last week’s lessons as a discussion of money, you will want to continue that today. We express our true selves quite often with the decisions we make about money. Do we trust or are we hedging our bets? What will do us the greatest good? That will surely receive our worship, indeed, our sacrifices of time and treasure and ability. Do we work far harder for our retirement accounts than we ever would for God? That is a very uncomfortable question to ask, but it strikes to the heart of the issue here. A trust failure is a sign of relational weakness.

There is a strange thing about the relationship which God has established in Baptism. We can turn our face to the wall, reject his love, and live outside that relationship, at least for a while.

Eventually such a “life” will lead only to death. But we can do it now. God so values that fundamental fact of our being, which we often call free will, that he will not force us. Our money often betrays to us that our god is not Him, but self. Who gets our money? All of it? There is only room for one god in all this. Who is yours?

If it is God, what does that trust look like? Again, not that the trust is the relationship, but trust is central to how we live it out. This is not the same thing for every person, this is the difficult thing in the regard. If we would make a new law for us to follow, soon we would simply trust our obedience instead of God and be right back where we started. But at the same time, such trust does take shape in life. This is a real trust. How does “I am trusting thee, Lord Jesus” show up in my checkbook?

Do we measure this in offerings/tithing? That seems a little crass and perhaps a great number of folks are expecting this sort of an answer. It is simply true that if everyone tithed (10%), the Church really would not have money troubles. Is that the measure? If it is, we fail. Last I saw Lutherans as a whole averaged somewhere around 2%.

If every dollar, however, belongs to God, if he is not just interested in the 10% but in the whole paycheck, what then? The Christian in trust will still buy his or her groceries to feed the family and self, but how would that be different if we understood that check to be a service to Christ at the same time? He died for those dollars and that time I spent earning them. How would that change the way I spend them?

What is the evidence of trust? Is it found in the generosity of time and treasure, not only in church but in all of life? Is it found in an openness of heart and life? It is far deeper than the silly trust-fall exercises we encourage our youth to do at retreats. Does this trust show up in an ability to forgive anyone? Does it show up in the willingness to help, because you know that God will make something even of a good deed that the world sees as wasted? I think sometimes our discussion of stewardship as being careful with our resources is misplaced. Sometimes it is a cover for our stinginess. We are good stewards and sometimes look like the man in the parable who buried his talent lest it be lost. It was the profligate investors of the two and five talents who really demonstrated the kingdom. I am reminded of the disciples feeding the multitudes. Jesus did not say “have lunch and feed them the leftovers.” They shared all they had that day with the people. That was their lunch they passing out. But they were also satisfied and there were baskets left over.

Collect of the Day

O God, You are the strength of all who trust in You, and without Your aid we can do no good thing. Grant us the help of Your grace that we may please You in both will and deed; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Again, as in the prior weeks, this prayer makes an assumption that is contrary to our culture. We are, in fact, not the self-reliant autocrats that we think we are. In truth, we are helpless and pitiable beings who are unable to choose the good things to do or accomplish any of them and utterly subject to the winds which we cannot control. We are in need of God's gracious help even to please God in will or deed. All the work we think we have done on our own is so much displeasing failure in relationship to God. He has to rescue this situation, he must sign the adoption papers. He must hire the attorney; he must make the sacrifice of his Son to gain children for himself this way. We cannot declare him to be our God, he must declare us to be his children.

This is not the message that our world has imbibed or convinced itself is true. Either it has said that we are able to do the good and thus approach God as his child, or it denies that there is any real good to do. It is a dog eat dog world and you need to take care of number one because no one else will.

How will our congregations receive this message, especially since we are talking about money today? It won't be an easy sell. If there is any place that we like to assert our "independence" it is in matters financial. We want to be the ones who decide how the money is spent and we like exert control with our money. If you have ever written a grant you know how this works. The folks with the money aren't just giving it away; they are controlling how it is spent. We can applaud that as responsible management of funds and giving, but we cannot call it gracious. It is the ways of the world that Jesus contradicted last week. Jesus is going to talk about another giving that is not controlling or an exercise of power. He will discuss the giving which God gives, the giving of true grace.

The preacher will want to remember the great risk of forgiveness today. There is no guarantee, and as soon as you seek that guarantee; you are outside the realm of grace and in the realm of law. I cannot start to lay down rules with my neighbor and demand that he follow them before I forgive him. If I do, I might control his behavior, at least while I am watching, but have not forgiven him, and I will not win his heart. The graciousness of God runs this terrible risk. We might just abuse it. Will we?

Amos 6:1-7

“Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,
and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria,
the notable men of the first of the nations,
to whom the house of Israel comes!

²Pass over to Calneh, and see,
and from there go to Hamath the great;
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

Are you better than these kingdoms?

Or is their territory greater than your territory,

³ O you who put far away the day of disaster
and bring near the seat of violence?

⁴ “Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory
and stretch themselves out on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock

and calves from the midst of the stall,
⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp
and like David invent for themselves instruments of music,

⁶ who drink wine in bowls
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile,
and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”

⁸ *The Lord GOD has sworn by himself, declares the LORD, the God of hosts:*

*“I abhor the pride of Jacob
and hate his strongholds,
and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it.”*

Amos is not happy here. He hasn't been happy for several chapters. In fact he won't really be happy until the last chapter of this book. His rant is thorough and bitter. The Israelites are completely ignoring the covenant of God's gracious love which he established at Sinai. This manifests in their treatment of the poor and their greed for the luxuries and the niceties of life. His depiction of them here as wine swilling gourmets and idle music makers is brutal and disturbingly contemporary. I don't think he is against wine drinking, by the way. (I have to put this in here for Ed's sake.) In his picture of the restoration of Israel the wine literally runs from the mountains in streams. I think his problem is that they don't care about the ruin of Jacob, the fact that the covenant is ignored and the prosperity masks the moral bankruptcy of the people.

His words of judgment are clear and equally devastating. The wealthy snobs will be the first ones led away into exile. Their delight will be their downfall, the reason the Assyrians are coming. If they had paid attention to the covenant, taken care of the poor, the widow, the resident alien, the Assyrian would not have come, they would have lived in the land as God intended them to. There is no one to blame but themselves.

Does this describe us? We can spend thousands on a high definition television, even more on a car that has the more powerful engine or the super suspension yet the lost are perishing without the knowledge and the love of Christ. The homeless are shivering in the doorways of our cities. The aged are struggling to make ends meet on a social security system that is inadequate. The poor kids are attending crumbling schools. The list could go on and on. Are we really in any way superior to the ancient Israelites? The people of Amos' day lived in a brief moment of incredible

prosperity in the ancient world. Their neighbors and trading partners, the Phoenicians or Canaanites as we know them better, were flowering in their trade. One of the things they traded as far as Spain was Israelite wheat, the wheat grown in the fertile valleys of the Galilee. It was a good partnership for both of them, they all got rich. At least the ones who managed to work their way into this arrangement got rich. The poor apparently did not. The prices went up and they got poorer. Is this sounding more and more familiar? Is this same sort of a situation which is driving some to shout loudly at the Trump rallies and earlier in this cycle at the Sanders rallies?

Amos will say this is not just a matter of social justice simply for social justice' sake. It is good to love the people and care for the poor, true, but Amos will see this as a spiritual problem which is manifested in the moral problem. It is the ruination of Jacob. The covenant has been forgotten, the blessed relationship that God established at Sinai and which ought to be the governing principle of life for every Israelite has been cast aside for the coarser ideals of wealth and prosperity, for luxury and gluttony. It is a shame that the poor are being ignored, but it is a bigger shame that the hearts of Israel don't care. We make a terrible mistake if we read Amos only as a prophet of social justice. He has a strong message there, but more importantly he understands that the faithful relationship sinners have with their gracious God is in fact the strongest protection the poor have, the best thing for the lonely and the widow and the outcast. Those people, loved thus by God will be filled with great love for others.

If you are interested in this text, you might just cast Jesus as the antidote to Amos' complaint. Jesus ascends a mountain, Golgatha, he gives up his leisure and security to suffer the indignity of a cross. He lies on no ivory bed but a rude manger and the hard wooden arms of a cross. The object of Amos anger is me, but the object of this other dweller on the mountain top, the object of his love is also me.

Psalm 146

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

² I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³ Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;

on that very day his plans perish.

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

⁶ who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;

⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD!

I commend this psalm as a potential sermon outline. In truth, the psalmist is expressing exactly what Amos wanted his audience to say. This is a pretty good way to live.

I Timothy 3:1-13 *We have options for the epistle reading today. The first is a reflection on the office of ministry which might be worth addressing. The second fits more appropriately into the themes addressed in the other readings.*

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

A noble task – I wonder how many of our young people see the office of pastor or deacon as a noble task these days. It was a generation ago, but already starting to erode, I think. Pastors have not always done much to foster that respect, it is true. Too often they have come across as self-serving or as lovers of contention and not lovers of God's people. Congregational infighting

has discouraged many from pursuing church work as well. The reality that many congregations are struggling and most of their peers do not attend worship also has to be a discouragement for any young man or woman who would aspire to the noble task.

Paul Mueller the Director of CALL, a joint operation within the Northwest District and Concordia University, is asking why this is and what we can do about this in some interesting ways. You may want to pay some attention to what comes from his office.

The behavioral bar is rather high and there has been some movement there. How many of us can say we manage our children well? But Paul says that this is a sign of one who is worthy of his office. The husband of one wife has also been troublesome for some within the public ministry. This does not mean that divorcees are not forgivable, but does it mean that they are not qualified for the office? In the same way I can forgive a thief but might not make him my business manager in charge of the petty cash.

Deacons don't get a lot of press in the Bible, but they do get some right here. We might want to preach the diaconal office today as a gift from God. It is not the pastoral office, that is another thing. This is the diaconal office, another good thing.

Notice that last verse there. The Deacons gain "great confidence in the faith" is that our trust issue? What does Paul mean by this?

Or I Timothy 6:6-19

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, ¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to

do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

This is also just too good to pass up – if you are preaching the money issue. The whole contentment theme is the opposite of monetary idolatry. We suffer from what could be described as affluenza, but is more accurately diagnosed as idolatry. Paul addresses the evils which flow out of such a trust in another. This is not a neutral thing, but a reality which pierces us with many pangs and involves cravings and all sorts of evils.

The trust which is placed in God in that faith relationship pursues the righteousness which Amos calls for and a host of good things. Nothing specific, because the good which I would do, might not be good when you do it. There is no new law here.

But also and equally importantly, notice that the problem is not the money itself. There are rich folks, and they should not be haughty, but should be rich in doing good, ready to share and thereby to take hold of that which is truly life. But it does not say that their money is the problem. It is the love of money from which flows the evil, not the money itself. Have we remembered that?

Luke 16:19-31 (Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man) *I have included the verses which are found between the end of last week's reading and the beginning of this parable. I think they are critical to understanding it.*

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it. ¹⁷But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.

¹⁸ "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to

us.’²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’²⁹ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

So why the intervening verses? First it establishes the permanence and immutability of God’s Law. It just doesn’t change from generation to generation. The sins of our fathers would still be sins today. God doesn’t deal in new dispensations with new rules for succeeding generations, no matter what the ethicists might tell us.

But then he goes into a brutal topic: Divorce. There is no personal tragedy quite like it. The participants know they have a mess on their hands, and they are utterly trapped by it. They cannot extricate themselves. It often leaves you financially poor but also spiritually poor, crushed, and almost lifeless. You are sure that everyone is talking about you at church, so you don’t go. You know that this is wrong, but you are powerless to fix it, and you slowly go through this relational train wreck with every court proceeding, with every document signed, with every parting out of a life which had grown together.

Then we get the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. Why the words on divorce immediately before, reinforced with the comment that the Law doesn’t change, no matter how many times we have bent it? I think that Jesus is again not really talking about money here, but money is a stand in, a metaphor for the treasure of the kingdom which is the forgiveness of sins, the love of God for sinners, the gracious act of God in Jesus.

Who is rich and poor in this parable? Does it not seem like helpless Lazarus, broken in body and finances, pitiable and outcast is by far richer than the Rich Man who seems to have his life all together, whose life is not a disaster? Is Lazarus far more like the poor divorced man who is sitting outside the fellowship of the church, expelled because he has not the spiritual capital to attend? Are the rich men those who sit in judgment of him inside, with their wife and children beside them, lives all tidy and neat and yet terribly empty in that they have no room for the little, least and lost, especially this divorced fellow outside the church?

There was a rich man and a poor man. The rich man has no name. But the poor man is given a name in this parable, which makes it rather unique in the genre of parable telling. The poor man’s name was Lazarus which means “God is my help.” He needed that help because he sure wasn’t getting any help from the rich man. This is a parable we could use to build upon our theme for last week and this all hinges on the name that Lazarus has. He is unique among the parables of Jesus in that he actually gets a name. No other actor in a parable is so blessed.

There are a number of themes in this thing, it is a strange parable actually because it is hardly an earthly story. In fact some have said that it is not really a parable at all, but much more like

an analogy or an allegory. What it clearly cannot be is a treatise on celestial geography or a description of the torments of hell or the blessings of heaven. These are all set within the cultural context of the audience to which Jesus spoke.

But the theme here is quite operative. Those who trust in the Lord know the end of the story. Those who trust in something else have a very different end. There is only one call toward that trust, it is to be found in Jesus' day among Moses and the Prophets. Today that word is proclaimed from Christian pulpits, television sets, street corners, large banners at football games and a host of other places; but the message is the same as it was when Jesus and John burst on the scene so long ago. Repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

If this is a parable about trust, is the Rich Man's real problem that he trusts his money and thus has nothing to share with poor Lazarus? Is Lazarus forced to trust in God because that is all he has? His health plan seems to have involved dogs licking sores, for heaven's sake! What sort of an HMO does he belong to? He must have signed up for the wrong health exchange under Obamacare!

The Rich man's brothers will either believe it or not, likewise many will either believe us or not. And for those who do, there is a great blessing, a wonderful end to the story. Resting in the bosom of Abraham, he is the picture of peace and serenity. The requests of the rich man cannot disturb him. His joy is complete.

Coming as it does on the heels of last week's lesson, it builds on the challenge which Jesus uttered there. You cannot serve both God and money, the time is upon us for a choice to be made. We will either serve the money and hate God or serve God and hate the money, be willing to let it go.

This sermon is about empowering that love of God and that ability to let the money go, or if my inclusion of the words on divorce have merit, It is necessary to remember that no matter how you identify the problem, the solution involves God's love for broken people. There is not one without the other, they go hand in hand. If you try to preach the money piece and leave out the love piece, it doesn't work. Likewise the love without the sacrificial life is also cheap and tawdry. The Christian who is not moved by preachers to be in service with time and treasures and talents is not really getting the good sermon. He is feeding at the trough but not growing and blooming as God has created him to do. He is a fruitless vine and that is not a good thing to be in this kingdom.

This we gather under the theme of trust. Last week we offered you two choices for the parable and those two continue through this week. In one choice suggested that we acknowledge the priority, the priority is God. He is number one. But there is a very good reason that he is number one. He is the best and the brightest because of his gracious love, his tender mercy, and his great gift to us. That giving to God the number one spot in our lives is an act of trust in the promises

that he makes to care for us, to love us, to forgive us, to be with us, to empower our lives and change our sin-riddled hearts.

On the other hand, we also offered up the interpretation that the unjust steward might just be a picture of the mechanism of forgiveness. Are we giving away something which we have not earned? Does God commend that? If you preached that, the divorce words come in very handy for continuing that line of thought into the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

This parable is about the fact that such trust is well placed. God keeps his promises. There is not one beggar who dies forgotten by the world who is not precious to God. There is not one sinner, even the ones which are cast out of churches through the arrogance of the “righteous” within who is forgotten by God. We are the creatures of his hand and all who trust in him, all of them, everyone of them, is on his mind. You can count on it.

I really think that the place to preach this text is in the Psalm. If you want an outline for this sermon, you could do a lot worse than that. Go back up there and read that before you write anything. Or you could use the second Epistle reading.

The trick is preaching the blessing of this without it turning into a works thing or into some sort of a manipulation of God. Bless is the best word for this. It keeps the action in God’s court but it is surely a good thing to say to a sinner and describes a very good thing for us. I would remember the language of the psalm when I come to write this sermon.

Now the whole point of this is preaching might be leading to next week when you will have a commitment Sunday, or some way for people to make the promise, make the vow, and follow through. Perhaps it will just begin that process, but it is a very good thing to have in place before you get there.

Law

1. The law is pretty straightforward here. The temptation of the rich man is to trust in his money. It buys him the nice things, the good doctors, the best food, the expensive Weight Watchers meals so he can live forever, right?
2. But the reality is also present that our trust is not usually in the money, but in the money manager - me. It is the tool which I am going to use to bring about my happiness, health, or other blessing.
3. The day that the reaper comes, the money doesn’t help. It cannot buy life, it is powerless to buy life. It can only deceive one into substituting money for the real life that God offers.

4. But there is more to the law here. It is hard to trust God and sometimes God seems to make it hard. When the bank accounts are empty and there are bills to pay, it is hard to trust God to find the solution or to bless the efforts. It is much easier to try and make a little blessing ourselves, by any means possible.
5. God looks at much larger pictures than we do and at longer time scales than we can imagine. I am like a single ant crawling across the floor in a line of ants. He knows where I am going and what is out there, long before I can see it. It is a hard thing to trust that the obstacles he places in my path are really for my own good. It would be so much easier if the well-paying job I wanted would have just come through. It would be so much easier if I had not made the decision I made to buy this house or make this move or ...you get the picture. Can't I just go to heaven on a first class ticket? I would really like to skip the persecution and the suffering piece. Is that really necessary? Sometimes it is. It seems to have been a good situation for poor Lazarus. It wasn't exactly the sort of health plan I am looking for, but the dogs were better than nothing and the retirement benefits were pretty spectacular. Am I ready to trust God that way?
6. They say the first missionaries to the Wyoming territories were sent by the LCMS on a train from Chicago with about \$10 in their pockets. Do I measure up to that trust? Do I really want to?
7. Our lack of trust often manifests in a hoarding personality. I will give, may even be thought of as generous. But do I really give out of my whole being or do I only give out of my excess? Do I give first or last? (if you are like many people, you have already thought about how to spend the money in your paycheck before you ever get it so which check you write first may not be an accurate determiner of priority/trust.
8. Our lack of trust often manifests in fear, a fear which governs our plans and our spending. I am not talking about being irresponsible. I think those who have been given charge to care for family, spouse, etc. have an obligation to steward money well, but there is also a sense of fear that can govern money decisions. It is not fun nor healthy.
9. **The cause and effect we like to do with money is really the problem we face. I am wealthy/healthy/"blessed" because I did something right. I treated people right, I took care of important things, and now I am blessed. There is truth here and yet a subtle lie as well. This is potentially a fundamental denial of the fact that these blessings are in fact a wealth.**
10. **In God we Trust, but I am going to make sure that my bank accounts are as full as possible just in case. The money monster can rise again.**

1. God is a worthy object of our trust. He does not let us down – it may seem that way sometimes, but ultimately, when it comes to the whole resurrection thing, he has demonstrated his ability and intent in Jesus. The true life of which Paul speaks in the Epistle lesson and which does not die, can only be found there.
2. He has made the earth, he has made the seas and all that is in them. He sustains life itself and created it. He can raise one more sinner like you.
3. What is more, God has repeatedly proved himself faithful and true to his word. The hungry get fed and the lost get found. How else can one explain the growth of Christianity? How else to explain the amazing work done by the Christian volunteers in Louisiana and the Gulf states since the fall of 2005. God saw the government wasn't going to do anything so he moved his people to help. And they have helped. Check out this link to an NPR website that talks about it <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5732202> (not one of your usually more friendly venues for this sort of thing, but there is a really nice picture of an LCMS Orphan Grain Train trailer in there)
4. The list of God's faith keeping is extensive. Just look at the psalm for the day. His reign will last forever. He doesn't get tired of doing this. He never grows weary of blessing his people.
5. The upshot of all this is that you and I have much we can trust God for. And one of the best places to exercise that trust is in our finances. This parable is about money. Last week was about money, next week is about money. Today the message is that we don't have let fear be our guide, we can trust God. This is a much happier way to live with blessings and especially money. It is an open invitation for us to be part of God's kingdom of Grace and love to this benighted world. It is a sweet way to live. It may not always be comfort as the world understands comfort, but it is a sweet way to live. Paul speaks of contentment.
6. God's love expressed in Jesus has created in me a trust in God which extends to every part of my life. Now, my money which once was a monster to be fed has become a delight and a joy- an opportunity to please my beloved Father God with word and deed. He has made a Lazarus of me.
7. And this also extends to the fact that I can run the risk of forgiveness. I don't need to enter into the book-keeping, bean counting world of scale balancing with my neighbor. I can really forgive him, welcome in the scoundrel because God has loved even me.
8. This makes the spending/giving into something completely different. Trusting God to be my persistent and caring God, I am freed by the Gospel to ask completely different questions of my money. I no longer have to be afraid of not having "enough" which we can

never seem to achieve. Now I can count on having enough, what is the best thing I can do with this wealth. How do I serve God best with it?

9. This is a whole new economy, a whole new math.

Sermon Ideas

1. The Lord is My Help (Gospel – That the hearer would confess and rejoice that he/she is utterly dependent upon God and God has provided all that is necessary to support this body and life.)

This is the stewardship sermon which builds on the theme from last week's sermon about priorities, the service rendered either to God or Money. The Christian may have messed up priorities, but the answer is not that we try real hard to change them, but that God enter this picture and completely re-orient our lives.

We are used to seeing this sort of thing regularly. When there is some terrible thing wrong with my body, I have to trust the doctor and the surgeon and the nurses when I enter that operating room. They will use sharp scalpels, needle and thread, drugs and the like to cut me open, remove the tumor, give me a chance to live. If I don't trust them, I will never check into that hospital, but trusting them, I can let them put that mask over my face and drift off to sleep aware of what they will do, but trusting them.

We do the same thing with accountants, attorneys, even the guy who is driving the car in the oncoming lane has to be trusted or I will never get behind the wheel of my own car.

God has entered our lives and laid claim to them by the blood of Jesus. He cares about every moment and every day. That does not mean that things will always go well for me, but it means that my life is always in God's hands and that frees me from the final responsibility for how things turn out. That freedom in turn lets me view my money totally differently. I am able to be generous and kind, as Paul exhorts the wealthy to do in the Epistle lesson. I can love the other, the poor man, with my money as the Amos exhorts in the OT lesson and as the rich man fails to do in the Gospel.

My faith trusts God. It is not without some risk. Sometimes he may lead me to poverty and suffering for my own sake his kingdom. But I know that finally he leads me to heaven and eternal joy. I can trust him. It is the only way that I can ever joyfully let go of anything. But with trust in him, I can be generous, even joyfully generous with all that he gives me.

2. The Dogs came Licked his Sores (Also from the Gospel Lesson – that the hearer would reject self-righteousness, trusting that God alone has provide him/her with the qualifications for heaven and granted all who trust in Him eternal life.)

This sermon continues the other reading of the parable of the unjust steward which we postulated last week. Therein we said that the unjust manager was in fact giving away the master's wealth, but was commended for doing so. We too are giving away God's riches when we forgive, and likewise are commended, earning a welcome to heavenly dwellings from the very people we are forgiving.

This sermon notices the words on divorce right before this and wonders if the difference between the rich man and Lazarus is not a monetary wealth, but a wealth in righteousness. Does the divorcee feel like old Lazarus, pining away outside the church, unwelcome, or at least feeling unwelcome. Are the wealthy in fact the folks who seem to have wealth, on the outside keeping things together, solid family, regular attenders, but cold and barren when you take a look inside their heart. The rich man had only a crust for Lazarus, but Lazarus, in his helplessness, had God in a way that the rich man, for all his blessings did not.

Clearly Jesus wants us to be "Lazarus-like" and not like the rich man. This sermon postulates that such a dependency, a poverty is not an expression of fiscal realities but spiritual realities. The one who is helpless before his condition, who does not count on his own wealth, that one has a great friend in God, who will lay him/her on the bosom of Abraham for eternal rest.

Amos was sent to call people back to the covenant, Jesus preached repent for the kingdom of God is near, I too am a preacher of God's kingdom and you are the audience. There is no second chance, there is no mulligan before the throne of God, no ghost of Christmas will come and rouse us from our spiritual scrooginess. God has sent me, this word and this promise. Believe it. your only hope, your only confidence is in God.

The recent book "Unchristian" really highlighted this fact about Churches. Most of those outside our doors think of Christians as judgmental. Lutherans tend to think that our doctrine is better than everyone else's. We can spot a heresy at forty feet, and so when some poor sinner expresses their faith in a way which makes us uncomfortable, we jump on the expression as inadequate, but do we really care for the poor heart that said it? Do we wonder what they feel and experience? There is more than one way to consider oneself "rich" in this regard. Are we theologically rich?

Just for your enjoyment I have included Rudyard Kipling's poem about the rich man in the parable we are reading today. He calls him by the old name which the King James used: Dives. He cynically suggests that real peace might be found in the economic bonds that the world creates between people. Is it cynical or is it the best hope that many people see in the world?

The Peace of Dives by Rudyard Kipling 1903 public domain

The Word came down to Dives in Torment where he lay:

"Our World is full of wickedness, My Children maim and slay,

"And the Saint and Seer and Prophet

"Can make no better of it

"Than to sanctify and prophesy and pray.

"Rise up, rise up, thou Dives, and take again thy gold,

"And thy women and thy housen as they were to thee of old.

"It may be grace hath found thee

"In the furnace where We bound thee,

"And that thou shalt bring the peace My Son foretold."

Then merrily rose Dives and leaped from out his fire,

And walked abroad with diligence to do the Lord's desire;

And anon the battles ceased,

And the captives were released,

And Earth had rest from Goshen to Gadire.

The Word came down to Satan that raged and roared alone,

'Mid the shouting of the peoples by the cannon overthrown

(But the Prophets, Saints, and Seers

Set each other by the ears,

For each would claim the marvel as his own):

"Rise up, rise up, thou Satan, upon the Earth to go,
"And prove the Peace of Dives if it be good or no:
"For all that he hath planned
"We deliver to thy hand,
"As thy skill shall serve, to break it or bring low."

Then mightily rose Satan, and about the Earth he hied,
And breathed on Kings in idleness and Princes drunk with pride.
But for all the wrong he breathed
There was never sword unsheathed,
And the fires he lighted flickered out and died.

Then terribly 'rose Satan, and darkened Earth afar,
Till he came on cunning Dives where the money-changers are;
And he saw men pledge their gear
For the gold that buys the spear,
And the helmet and the habergeon of war.

Yea, to Dives came the Persian and the Syrian and the Mede --
And their hearts were nothing altered, nor their cunning nor their greed --
And they pledged their flocks and farms
For the King-compelling arms,
And Dives lent according to their need.

Then Satan said to Dives: -- "Return again with me,
"Who hast broken His Commandment in the day He set thee free,
"Who grindest for thy greed
"Man's belly-pinch and need,
"And the blood of Man to filthy usury!"

Then softly answered Dives where the money-changers sit: --

"My Refuge is Our Master, O My Master in the Pit.

"But behold all Earth is laid

"In the Peace which I have made,

"And behold I wait on thee to trouble it!"

Then angrily turned Satan, and about the Seas he fled,

To shake the new-sown peoples with insult, doubt, and dread;

But, for all the sleight he used,

There was never squadron loosed,

And the brands he flung flew dying and fell dead.

But to Dives came Atlantis and the Captains of the West --

And their hates were nothing weakened nor their angers unrest --

And they pawned their utmost trade

For the dry, decreeing blade;

And Dives lent and took of them their best.

Then Satan said to Dives: -- "Declare thou by The Name,

"The secret of thy subtlety that turneth mine to shame.

"It is knowvn through all the Hells

"How my peoples mocked my spells,

"And my faithless Kings denied me ere I came."

Then answered cunning Dives: "Do not gold and hate abide

"At the heart of every Magic, yea, and senseless fear beside?

"With gold and fear and hate

"I have harnessed state to state,

"And by hate and fear and gold their hates are tied.

"For hate men seek a weapon, for fear they seek a shield --

"Keener blades and broader targets than their frantic neighbours wield --

"For gold I arm their hands,

"And for gold I buy their lands,

"And for gold I sell their enemies the yield.

"Their nearest foes may purchase, or their furthest friends may lease,

"One by one from Ancient Accad to the Islands of the Seas.

"And their covenants they make

"For the naked iron's sake,

"But I -- I trap them armoured into peace.

"The flocks that Egypt pledged me to Assyria I drive,

"And Pharaoh hath the increase of the herds that Sargon gave.

"Not for Ashdod overthrown

"Will the Kings destroy their own,

"Or their peoples wake the strife they feign to brave.

"Is not Carchemish like Calno? For the steeds of their desire

"They have sold me seven harvests that I sell to Crowning Tyre;

"And the Tyrian sweeps the plains

"With a thousand hired wains,

"And the Cities keep the peace and -- share the hire.

"Hast thou seen the pride of Moab? For the swords about his path,

"His bond is to Philistia, in half of all he hath.

"And he dare not draw the sword

"Till Gaza give the word,
"And he show release from Askalon and Gath.

"Wilt thou call again thy peoples, wilt thou craze anew thy Kings?
"Lo! my lightnings pass before thee, and their whistling servant brings,
"Ere the drowsy street hath stirred,
"Every masked and midnight word,
"And the nations break their fast upon these things.

"So I make a jest of Wonder, and a mock of Time and Space,
"The roofless Seas an hostel, and the Earth a market-place,
"Where the anxious traders know
"Each is surety for his foe,
"And none may thrive without his fellows' grace.

"Now this is all my subtlety and this is all my Wit,
"God give thee good enlightenment. My Master in the Pit.
"But behold all Earth is laid
"In the Peace which I have made,
"And behold I wait on thee to trouble it!"

One commentator noted that until the invasion of Russian armies into Georgia within the past couple of years, no country with a McDonalds had ever waged war on another country with McDonalds. Is it another way of stating Kipling's point?