

23 September 2007  
Pentecost 17

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Giving Sons of a Giving God”

Text: Luke 16:1-15

*(For many of the thoughts and phrases in this sermon I am indebted to Dr. Normal Nagel, sermon for Pentecost 14, in Selected Sermons of Normal Nagel, CPH 2004, 203-208. This is a reprise of a sermon preached in 2004, with a few minor modifications.)*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Our God is a giving God.** He gives life, He gives riches, He gives salvation. None of it deserved; none of it earned; none of it really ours. All belongs to the Giver, who has generously and graciously given it to us for our use. The question is then, how are we using that which we have been given?

If we give what has been given to us, we show ourselves to be sons of God. Sons who do what their Father does. But if we selfishly keep for ourselves what has been given to us; and if we try to get from others what has been given to them, we show ourselves to be sons of the evil one. Sons who also do what their father does.

**Our God is a giving God.** And so what happens if we claim to be sons of God but live as sons of the evil one live? What witness are we giving the world? What will they think of God? What we will have shown them our Father is like? A giver or a taker? A good and gracious God or a hard and demanding God? The answer is an uncomfortable one, isn't it?

And so perhaps we should ask why we do what we do? That we are sinners is true, but that is too easy an answer. Perhaps we even use that as an excuse, thinking that it isn't our fault that we are as we are. But it is our fault. For don't we do what we do because we believe that is where our happiness lies? If I have, if I can get, if I can acquire, then I will be happy. But that is the lie and deception the devil has been spinning ever since the beginning. And the result is very little contentment, very little happiness, in our world today. And what happiness there is is often frail and fleeting.

**Our God is a giving God**, and the secret of happiness and joy lies in Him – in Him who has nothing to get and everything to give. In giving away His gifts, God has His happiness. And so if we are to be faithful stewards of all that our Master has given to us, and share in His joy, it will be in that we show ourselves to be as generous givers as we have been given to. In not only money, but especially in time, in compassion, in forgiveness, in care, in love. And then we are faithful – not because we have *done* good deeds – but because through our lives we have shown others the true nature and grace of our Father. That **our God is a giving God**.

And so it is that when the manager in the parable told by Jesus today is found to be unfaithful in carrying out His duties, the master is concerned and upset. Why? Because he will be not-quite-so-wealthy as he was before? Hardly. He will collect his debts with or without this manager. There is always another that could be hired. But what else has the manager done with his dishonesty? He has borne false witness of his master. He has represented him falsely and carelessly and dishonestly, and so through the actions of the manager, the reputation and good name of the master was hurt.

And so we can now also understand why not only those whose debts were reduced, but also *the master*, commended his manager at the end. It was not because of his dishonesty, but because he shrewdly used the gift of time that he had been given, and in so doing began also to restore the good name of his master. It took a great loss to make him realize that his life was to be found not in getting, but in giving. As long as his loyalty and thinking was divided, in serving both himself and his master; in seeking gain for both himself and his master, he could serve neither.

And so too with God. **Our God is a giving God**, and so He is not pleased when we take what He has given to us to use and to manage, and use it in a way that shows our Father to be what He is not. He is not concerned with the riches; He doesn't need them. He is concerned about His Name, and the salvation that comes by His Name. And He is concerned about this not only for others, but for us as well.

Because when we are so concerned and consumed with **getting** (like the Pharisees and the folks we heard about from the prophet Amos), we forget what God is like and become concerned about **getting** also from God. No longer receiving from Him, but now thinking: How can I **get** from God what I want? How can I **get** from God my forgiveness and salvation? How can I **get** from God my happiness? And

once we **get**, then move on to other, more important, things, relegating God to just one more thing on our list. And our relationship with God gets turned onto its head. For with such a model whose in charge? And we forget that **our God is a giving God**; *now* He is a God who gives as reward. He is *now* a God we must **get** from, at a price. Therefore we will show God what good and splendid people we are!

But that is exactly what God does not want to do, or want us to do. **Our God is a giving God**. He is a God of gifts, not wages; of grace, not works; of promises, not demands. He gives and we receive. That is the only way of it with Him. His giving what we do not deserve is grace, and our receiving what He gives is faith. "Getting" has no place here; it is the intrusion and diversion of the devil. Our Father's way is that He graciously gives, and our response is that we thankfully receive. That is what makes God happy, and it is what alone will make us happy.

And the gift that God gives is above all His Son. His Son Jesus, who was the perfect steward – always giving, and showing perfectly the nature and grace of His Father. For though we be unfaithful, joining the long and notorious line of God's unfaithful people from the very beginning – God does not stop being who He is. He does not stop giving. No, He gives even more. **Our God is a giving God**, which means even when we don't deserve it. *Especially* then, for is that not our constant state? Is that not what it means to receive? . . . And so God gives; He gives His Son. His Son to take our sins. His Son to die on the cross in our place. His Son to "get" what we have earned, that He might give us instead forgiveness. The forgiveness won by Christ's atoning death and victorious resurrection. And with this forgiveness, salvation. Salvation to stop what we've been up to, and give us a *new* life. To save us not only from our sins, but to save us from ourselves. That in Christ, we might be set free from the endless cycle of getting and wanting, getting and wanting. That futile cycle that robs us of our joy and happiness.

Once we understand that, we can then understand our stewardship, our managing of all that God has given to us. Not trying to serve both God and ourselves, God and money, and thereby serving neither – but showing ourselves to be sons of God. Not striving to get, but to receive and to give. For that is God's way of doing things.

And so we come to this house, not to get or to do, but to receive. To receive the Name of God, to receive His forgiveness, to receive His Word, to receive His mercy, to receive His Body and Blood, to receive His blessing, to receive His kingdom, to receive all His gifts! And we leave this place and give these same gifts. . . . When it

comes to the things of this world, it is a little different. God gives those gifts to the just *and* the unjust – what separates us then is not the receiving, but the giving. The use. And we show that we have been given the eternal, the greater, the true riches, by how we handle the lesser, the riches of this world.

And the opportunities to show this are plentiful. To give to spouse, to family, to friends, and to those knocked about beside the road. To give to our enemies, which provides the greatest opportunity because we cannot so easily mix giving with getting. And in so giving, our joy increases. We are faithful managers. Showing others who our God truly is, and increasing His happiness.

**Our God is a giving God,** *“desiring all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* This truth: that He wants to give Himself and all that He is to you. Freely and graciously, without any merit or worthiness in you. That you may not only receive this gift, but that you may also give the same, and have His happiness and joy. For this is the way of God. This is the way of His kingdom. And this kingdom has been given to you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.