

Sermon for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
23.ix.2007, 10:00 ELW Service of the Word
Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113;1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

“And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

--Luke 16:8

The First Nations of North America, at least those north of Mexico, found the behavior of the white settlers and invaders very strange. They dressed strangely. They talked strangely and most of them smelled appallingly because, with the exception of the Finns and Swedes in the Delaware Valley, they did not know how to clean themselves by means of the sweat lodge.

To the American Indians, the strangest thing of all about the Europeans was their idea of land ownership. Though the first nations and tribes of this land marked off and defended their hunting and fishing and gathering territory to some extent, none of them ever thought that they *owned* the land and the plants and trees, the animals and the skies above like the whites did. From the coast of New England and the Maritime Provinces of Canada to the Florida Keys, from the Cherokee Nation in Georgia to the Ojibway of the Upper Midwest, from the Algonquin of Pennsylvania to the Comanche, Sioux, Kiowa, Cheyenne and Blackfeet of the Great Plains and beyond, the land and its fruits were understood as the property of the one Great Spirit given to us humans and the animals as our companions and sometimes more spiritually sublime elders in this world. ‘Ownership’ of the creation belonged to the

Creator only. In this understanding the Native Americans were more biblical than the Catholics and Protestants who claimed the land for their European sovereigns and for themselves.

By contrast, the Lord Jesus and His disciples lived in a time and place in which people were divided pretty much between owners and slaves, between those who owned property and those who, for all practical purposes, *were* property. The Galilean land owner might complain about the Roman occupiers, but he was perfectly willing to let the Romans enforce Roman law to evict a tenant who failed to pay his rent or a tenant's widow with no family to support her and her orphaned children. Eight hundred years before Christ the Prophet Amos had described this

practice and the mentality behind it, as I hope we heard clearly in today's first reading.

Within such a culture of oppression, little people will always find a way to survive, little people like the shrewd steward in the parable Our LORD tells in today's Gospel. Knowing he was about to be pink-slipped for 'squandering his master's property,' the manager squanders it some more and makes friends with everyone under him and with all those small business owners who owed his big boss something by slashing their debt. After all, he would soon be out on the street where they lived, in need of life's necessities and in need of a new job.

The normal reaction of an employer, on finding out that a soon-to-be ex-employee would be different from that of the master of the estate in today's Gospel. The normal

reaction would be to file charges against such an employee for embezzlement and racketeering. But that is *not* what the master in today's Gospel does because He is not just the master of an estate but rather the Master of the Universe, the LORD God Himself, and His estate is the Kingdom of God.

The shrewd steward is doing just what the Master does, you see. How does he make friends with his underlings, soon to be his equals and even betters? He 'cuts them a break,' as we would say. He does *not* demand of them what they actually owe, but only what they can pay. The Master in the parable is absolutely delighted.

Our Heavenly Father is delighted with us whenever we 'squander' His blessings on others, the materials blessings others need to live and to enjoy life and the

spiritual blessings of kindness, compassion, mercy, understanding and encouragement. Go ahead! Give it all away! There is much, much more where that came from, from the heart of the Father's love. Make it easy on others who have not had it easy. Do not demand as much as that to which you have a right. Does the Father do any differently by you? Did the Father spare *any* cost for your salvation? You know the answer to that. Go, and do likewise. ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever! ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !