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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, September 18 2022
15th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 25/Year C

First Reading: Amos 8:4-7

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Gospel Reading: Luke 16:1-13

Sermon Title: “Spiritually Disciplined”

Theme

As we are invited today to consider what it means to be managers (rather than owners) of all that we have, it is crucial to recognize that we are bought with a price. “Christ Jesus, himself human, . . . gave himself a ransom for all.” Apart from the generosity of God we have nothing—we are nothing. By God’s gracious favor we have everything we need.

Texts:

First Reading: Amos 8:4-7

⁴Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
⁵saying, “When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
⁶buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.”

⁷The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Surely I will never forget any of their deeds.

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is right and is acceptable in the

sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For

there is one God;

there is also one mediator between God and humankind,

Christ Jesus, himself human,

⁶who gave himself a ransom for all

—this was attested at the right time. ⁷For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Gospel: Luke 16:1-13

¹Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. ²So he summoned him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’ ³Then the manager said to himself, ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’ ⁵So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’ ⁷Then he asked another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’ ⁸And 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. ⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

¹⁰“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. ¹¹If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹²And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Sermon

Recently, a news story broke about a pastor of a church in Mercer County who is now charged with the felony charge of corruption of minors, three misdemeanor counts of criminal solicitation, and unlawful contact with a minor. I don't want to be guilty of judging the man without due process, but presuming for the moment that he is guilty, what he did was not just wrong and unlawful, but it was also immoral and ungodly. For the purpose of this sermon, I will call it being *spiritually undisciplined*.

There is a high standard placed on the behavior *of all* who call Jesus, our Christ and the only mediator between God and ourselves, you and I included. There is an even higher standard placed on those who accept the call to serve the Lord's church through the ordained ministry. I think we can all agree that especially when working with minors who can be manipulated by people in authority, the only honorable way to behave is to be "*Spiritually Disciplined*." And let me add, you and I have a right to expect better from our religious leaders.

First Timothy is a letter from the apostle Paul to his understudy, Timothy, and if you were to search the scriptures to find a passage that was a

- a succinct explanation of the life of the disciple and
- a succinct explanation of the Gospel, and
- and a succinct explanation of who Paul was and what his vocation was

then you can find it in this passage. And in summary, it is a definition of what it means to be "*Spiritually Disciplined*." Allow me to break all that down for you.

Paul wrote that the life of the disciple includes being prayerful people. Paul wrote,

¹I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for *everyone*

- Let me ask you when you hear the word "everyone" who is excluded?
- Does that mean that if you live in Canfield, you have to pray for people in Poland?
- Does that mean if you are white, you have to pray for people of color?

- Does that mean if you identify as a Republican you have to pray for President Biden? (Oh, now I've gone too far, haven't I?)

True story: You will recall that back in 2008, Barack Obama, a black man, ran for the presidency of the United States against Mitt Romney, a white Mormon. The election was contentious, not because Mitt Romney was a Mormon, but because Barack Obama was black. During that election season, the little church up north prayed weekly for a civil election season and a peaceful transition of power no matter who won. That went okay.

But when Obama won, and we began praying for his safety and success as president, a member came up to me and asked me to "Please stop praying for that man." I argued that whether he liked the outcome or not, Obama WAS our president, and success for him likely translates to success for the whole country. And the opposite is also likely true, a lack of success for Obama likely means a lack of success for the whole country. The man argued with my logic and yelled, "He is not MY president!" To which I replied, "Yes, he is. And if someone assassinates him we will have a civil war between the races that will make the 60's look like a game of cowboys and Indians" – sorry, cowboys and indigenous peoples.

Whether we voted for those who hold positions of leadership over us or not, it only makes sense that we pray for their wise leadership. We may argue what "wise leadership" is, but let's agree, that we don't want what it is not; we don't want chaos.

Paul wrote that we do this so that we will have ^{2b}a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. Does a "quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" sound appealing to you? Maybe better than the life, you have now? The more mature I get, the better that sounds. Am I right? Or do some just love chaos?

Paul went on to write that,

³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires *everyone* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

So Paul wrote, "this is right and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior."
Brothers and sisters, living a "*Spiritually Disciplined*" life means that *we do* what is

right and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. Frankly, what we have rationalized that aligns with our opinion of what is right and acceptable, is still only our opinion, and what God our Savior considers right and acceptable surpasses our opinions.

Paul also wrote that God desires that ‘everyone be saved.’ People in Poland and Canfield? All people regardless of color? People of all political perspectives? Yes, God desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Paul wrote that this is “right and acceptable in the sight of God our savior.’

Don’t you just hate this teaching?

Being that we are born into sin and cannot help ourselves, some of us like division. We know we are right, and anyone who sees a given situation differently is just wrong! We are so set in our own paradigms that we cannot see the world from a different perspective. Paul has a solution for that problem too. He wrote that:

⁵there is one God;
there is also one mediator between God and humankind,
Christ Jesus, himself human,
⁶who gave himself a ransom for all

“Oh sure Pastor, throw down the Jesus card!”

Wait a minute. You said that “a quiet and peaceable life” sounded good. You said that you claim Jesus, as Christ and the only mediator between God and yourself. Good for you, according to Paul, that is the only answer that leads to salvation. However, those claims require action, behavior, or as I have entitled this sermon, requires that we be “*Spiritually Disciplined.*”

When we claim Jesus as “God our Savior” and our Christ and the only mediator between God and ourselves, and desire the many benefits that come with that claim, then there is the expectation, no, the requirement that we will align our lives with his example, or as I often say, if it matters to Jesus, it ought to matter to us. I caution you, don’t let the world, the culture, and society suck you into its vortex that only leads to destruction.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

If you claim Jesus as Christ and the only mediator between God and yourself, then you have set for yourself a new standard of living. You must be "*Spiritually Disciplined.*"

Forget what society says – that is usually a pretty low bar.

Forget what the law says, and just to be clear, by the law, I am speaking of the Ohio Revised Code, the Federal Law, etc. Just because it's legal, doesn't make it right or godly.

And forget what your mind attempts to convince you is not sin:

- No blood, no foul.
- No one is harmed by it, so it's not really a sin.
- The end justifies the means.

No, forget all that stinking thinking. Paul wrote to Timothy, that to claim to be Christian, which literally means to be a little Christ, then we have to be "*Spiritually Disciplined.*"

Pray. Pray for your own spiritual growth – the LORD will honor that request.

Pray for spiritual discernment in complicated issues – the LORD will honor that request.

Pray for a greater understanding of the perspective of others – the LORD will honor that request.

If you do this, you will "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity." And that will please God. And that is the godly person's first priority.

If you hope for a better life for yourself, your spouse, your family, your community ..., then listen to this teaching and apply it to your life. Hope happens here.

Prayer

Loving God, you love all that you have created, and yet, in our sinful nature, we want to divide and defeat, segregate and exploit others to our own advantage. Keep our feet on holy ground, and our minds and hearts attuned to the example of Jesus Christ, our only mediator between you and ourselves. We pray this in his name.
Amen