

# EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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There are certain things that grab our attention and move us to action right away – things like sharp chest pain or suspicious debits in our bank accounts.

- However, spiritual matters and the state of our souls aren't always at the top of the list (or even *on* it!).

Why is that? Aren't we talking about eternity? Isn't that what we believe?

1. The impact may not seem as present to us as the material
  - Physical pain and necessity are easier to understand, so the warning bells seem to ring a little louder
  - We might think of "eternity" as a long way off, "the *after*-life" – we don't have to deal with that until we die.
2. Doesn't the spiritual life just kind of take care of itself?
  - God is love and all is right with the world now that Jesus has died for us, so I don't need to bother too much with it.

Mmmm, I don't know about that...you'd never get that impression just from reading the gospels

- John the Baptist and Jesus: Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand = Turn your life around, the kingdom of God is *bearing down on you*
- This is nothing less than total urgency; nothing lackadaisical about narrow door, outer darkness, bridesmaids locked out, etc.

But for all the reasons above, we can pretty easily find ourselves coasting, even sleepwalking through life – and in the parable from today's gospel lesson, Jesus is giving us a wake-up call.

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Everything starts when a steward is charged with wasting his rich master's property.

- I think it's worth noting here that you could also translate the Greek, "scattering" or "dispersing"
- Not stealing, just careless, negligent
- He's been coasting along, not really paying attention

But this is a wake-up call – he's shaken out of his complacency and sees how serious the situation is.

- Totally helpless on his own – so he hatches a morally-questionable and deeply-flawed plan, taking decisive and desperate action,
- hoping that by showing as much mercy as possible, he'll be shown some in return
- Whereas before he was just careless, now he's being downright criminal, *intentionally* swindling the rich man for his own gain
- Then the *twist*: instead of being irate and throwing him in jail, the rich man *commends* him for his *shrewdness*!

Now, what are we supposed to take from this example? What point could Jesus possibly be making here?

- Just this: that when the steward got a wake-up call, he moved with urgency, and took drastic action
- Now it's easy to say, "Of course he acted – he didn't have a choice," but we've all seen that that's not exactly true.

There are plenty of people that get a wake-up call, but then just hit snooze and go right back to sleep.

- Our financial health is vital – but people go broke all the time, even those that seem to have lots of resources
- Our physical health is vital – but we all know stories of people who have a heart attack or a stroke, but don't make any changes.

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- And of course, nothing is more important than the state of our soul – but many people live without giving it a second thought, even after some sort of wake-up call leads them to take notice

What Jesus is showing us in the example of the steward is that even though he wasn't really repentant, his plan was so desperate that he went from careless to dishonest, and his motive for showing mercy was totally selfish, he *acted* – and God can work with that.

- We can (and do!) get a lot of things wrong in the spiritual life, but if we're willing to *act*, God can help us
- But if we just keep hitting snooze, eventually not even God will be able to wake us up

The first thing we need to do is really, truly understand that there is nothing more important than our relationship with God, and be willing to take action when we see that it's threatened.

Remember: the spiritual is *more* real than the material, not the other way around.

- Your body doesn't have a soul, your soul has a body
- The material is just a part of the spiritual that helps us as creatures understand something about our Creator

That's why Jesus tells us specifically that we can gain the whole world and still have nothing if we've lost our souls.

- Money, fame, success, pleasure? A healthy relationship with God will lead us to use them for the best, rather than getting used by them
- Family, friends? A healthy relationship with God will lead us to love them better than we ever could on our own

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The other thing we need to do is purposefully point our whole lives toward God.

- If we don't have a plan for the journey, it will take us a lot longer to notice that we've gotten off-track.
- If I commit to praying and reading the Bible every day, I'll know if I've started to slip.
- If I've resolved not to do anything that might offend or displease God and impair our relationship, I'll notice when I do.

This doesn't mean that we won't ever stumble and fall - we will.

- But being a saint doesn't mean that you never fall – but that you always get up.
- And every time we do, God helps us, so that over time, our repentance will grow more sincere, our plans will look more and more like his plans, and we'll become selfless and even joyful in showing mercy.

Helping us to grow in our knowledge and love of him, is what God delights in – but we can't be careless, we can't keep hitting snooze.

So look at your life – is there anything that isn't pointed toward God?

- Is there anything in your heart that he isn't a part of?
- Ask him to show you how he loves you and wants more of you –
- And be ready to act