

## Sermon for Trinity 9 - Luke 16:1-9

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

He had hit the low point. All the petty theft, skimming off the top, and hidden expenditures had finally caught up with him. And the boss man had him cornered. The master said to his dishonest manager in today's parable: "What is that that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager." Frightening words to the dishonest manager: "Give the account!" Who could stand before such an intimidating figure while being completely guilty?!? What's more, his livelihood was taken away. How would he provide for his family? He could not dig. He would not beg. He needed a way out. He needed a moment of rescue.

So wise words come to him by way of today's epistle reading: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

And notice what this Bible passage *doesn't* say: "God won't give you more than you can handle." So what do people and refrigerator magnets mean when they say, "God won't give you more than you can handle"? Do they mean that if I'm given one more thing than I can handle I'll explode or cease to exist? That if I fail to handle something, God has failed me? That anything I've not experienced is clearly beyond my capacity to handle? 1 Corinthians 10:13, "God is faithful, and will not let you be tempted beyond your own ability," is not talking so much about handling difficult life situations, as it is about overcoming the temptation to sin when faced with them. Now what does that mean?

What's our go-to when we face a problem? Blame others? Shirk our responsibility? Perhaps we concoct a plan to excuse ourselves, after all, this couldn't possibly be our fault! When we face a tragedy, do we fall into self-pity? Do we plumb the depths of self-absorption? Do we doubt the goodness of God?

These are the very temptations God wants us to escape. To be clear, He has *not* promised not to give us more than we can handle. In fact, God may very well give us more than we can handle, as anyone who's lived through a tragedy knows. You know this. There isn't a person on earth who imagines a scenario like being mugged, losing a job, losing a close loved one, or contracting a chronic disease and thinks, "Yeah, I'd do pretty well with that." The Bible itself gives us further proof: Did Job say, "Go ahead and take all my possessions and livestock. I'm good with that. Murder all my sons and daughters. It'll be fine. While you're at it, cover my body with oozing sores. Make my wife tell me to curse God and send some friends to continually berate me during my suffering. That I can handle." Was Martha able to handle the death of her brother Lazarus and mourn him 3 long days? Was Anna in the temple glad to be a young widow after only 7 years of marriage? Not hardly!

None of these people were happy about what had happened to them; they felt pain and grief and loss just as we would. But they believed that God was good. They trusted His promise to make all things new. They believed they were sinners who could not see the whole picture, yet trusted that God's ways were higher than their own ways. They believed there was more to life than this life, and that the life to come was much more important. They preferred seeking reception into eternal dwellings rather than compromising the truth God's goodness for temporal ones.

Job acknowledged unreservedly that his suffering had come from God, and he still looked forward with awe to seeing his Redeemer in the flesh. Martha didn't take the loss of her brother Lazarus as proof that Jesus was a fraud, but instead confessed Him to be the Resurrection and the Life, the Christ the Son of God. Anna didn't allow her husband's death to become a reason for avoiding the Lord's house. Even the dishonest manager trusted the mercy of his rich master after he had been canned.

And if these Bible characters are no different than we are, neither are their trials different than ours. We may suffer, and horribly. God may give us more than we can handle physically, emotionally, or mentally. But Jesus tells us straight-up: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Those who best "handle" the hardships of life are the ones who trust that God, who spared not His only Son, seeks what's best for us. Even though He appoints crosses for each of us to bear, the way of escape God has provided is Himself. God is our helper. He is with them that uphold our soul. The Lord saves us by His name. He forgives the doubt, anger, fear, and despair that arise in our sinful hearts in response to the trouble we face. He forgives our every last debt. Christ turns in the account of our lives and shows us to be blameless. Our Lord, whose name is excellent in all the earth and whose glory is above the heavens gives us lowly sinners His perfect glory. He covers our sin, which includes our worry and our doubt, with His own unwavering trust in the midst of death on the cross. His Holy Blood frees us from shame and the account of our misdeeds. He lived the problem-filled life of sinners not so that we wouldn't have problems, but so we would see that there is such a thing as a faithful life in a fallen world.

Our suffering is God's personal call to us to repent, to trust, and to hope in Him alone. He has provided the way of escape through His own life, death, and resurrection, and He has endured every temptation we face. He sympathizes with us in our weakness, He hears our prayers, and He absolves us of every sin we confess, including those occasioned by suffering. To believe this is to handle whatever life hands you. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✕BJF✕