

**“You’re fired!” Luke 16:1-13**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost    October 3, 2004    Pastor Jon Bergemann**

Come, Holy Spirit! Renew our hearts and kindle in us the fire of Your love! Amen. The Word of God for our consideration this morning is found in Luke chapter 16 (read text). In the name of Jesus, who has worked perfectly in our place, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

“You’re fired!”

A large portion of America is tuning in to NBC every Thursday night at 9 to hear these very words. These words are uttered by multi-millionaire business mogul Donald Trump at the end of the weekly reality show, “The Apprentice.”

For those of you unfamiliar with the format of the show, a group of up and coming businessmen and women are competing with one another for the chance to work for Mr. Trump and his corporation. Each week they must prove their business savvy through different assignments (such as creating ad campaigns for Crest, or opening a new restaurant). And, of course, each week one more contestant is cut loose – is fired by Mr. Trump – until the final apprentice becomes the employee.

I’ve seen a couple of episodes and let me tell you – these people are shrewd! They will stop at almost nothing to avoid hearing those words “You’re fired!” And if they think they might be the next to get axed, they will do whatever they can to make themselves look as good as possible. No opportunity is missed to advance themselves and their careers.

Reality T.V. shows are a fairly new concept, but in our gospel reading today, Jesus tells a story that could be lifted out of one of the juiciest episodes of The Apprentice. What’s happening?

A business manager knows that he is about to hear the phrase, “You’re fired.” He is called into the “boardroom” of his rich employer and is being accused of wasting his positions. He is getting fired from his managerial duties.

BUT . . . before he leaves for good, he makes some shrewd business deals. He secretly contacts all those who owe his employer money. He shrewdly cuts one man’s debt in half and takes 20% off another man’s bill. His reasoning? When he is out of a job, which will be almost momentarily, these people whose bills he reduced will remember that he was a nice guy. In fact, he reasons, out of gratitude for his generosity, they might even give him a job. The plan is so shrewd, even his boss has to commend him for his opportunistic dealings (which, though the parable doesn’t say, he probably followed with the words “you’re fired!”)

So why did Jesus tell this parable? Were His disciples bored and needed a juicy story to keep them awake? Or is Jesus taking a break from preaching and doing miracles and healing the sick to do a side gig as a key note speaker for a business conference instead?

No. Jesus tells this parable to focus us on the incredible responsibility he has given us, and the incredible opportunities that surround us. Listen to what he says in verses 8-9, **“For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”**

Jesus is giving us his eternal business plan. He is telling us that the dishonest manager in this story, for all his conniving and shady dealings, exhibits one characteristic that we can imitate: he is opportunistic. He seeks to use whatever wealth he has access to make things happen.

We’ve said before that a parable, such as Jesus tells here, is an earthly story with a heavenly, or spiritual meaning. So what is the spiritual truth Jesus is telling us? Be opportunistic with all the gifts that he has given us. Use whatever time, talents or treasures he has given you to spread His Word. Use your worldly wealth to gain friends not just for now, but for forever! Use your wealth to seize the opportunities for spreading His Word!

That’s the charge that our ultimate boss, our holy God, has given us. But if you and I were called into “the boardroom” of God, so to speak, how would we fare? If God were to sit across from us and analyze our management of His gifts, how would He feel? Or rather, how

would WE feel? Would we be confident that we would be promoted? Or fearful that we would be fired?

We have an incredible privilege to give a portion of our income back to our God. We do this not because “we have to or else”, but rather out of thanks for all our God has done for us. Yet, if God called us into His boardroom and evaluated our attitudes in giving, would He always see us receive our paychecks accompanied by hearts bouncing with joy at the thought, “Hey, I can use a portion of this to support God’s work and win eternal lives!” Or would He ever see us view our offerings as “that other thing we should probably take care of”, as if God were some celestial billing company that needed our payment? Would He see us eager to make our giving to Him a priority in our spending, or would He ever hear the afterthought, “Oh yeah, that’s right, I forgot about my offering. I was so busy paying the cable bill, and grocery bill, and shopping expenses, and eating out, etc., etc.” How would our Holy God evaluate our use of His monetary gifts? Would we be fired?

If God were to sit down and take a look at how we spend our time, would we be proud? Or would we be ashamed for Him to see the minutes, and hours that we have let slip away without seizing opportunities to grow in His Word through Bible study and devotion, and without going forth with His Word by telling others the good news of Jesus? Remember, just because we may be “busy” and doing a lot of things in our days, doesn’t mean that we are using our time to seize every opportunity to grow in His Word and go out with that Word to win more souls for Jesus. How would our Holy God evaluate our use of His gift of time? Would we be fired?

If God were to sit down and evaluate our use of our talents, would we be proud? Or would we be ashamed for Him to see the lost potential, laziness, and lukewarm hearts which we may have exhibited at times towards His work? Would we be fired?

If God were to sit across from us and evaluate our actions and attitudes in regard to the treasures, the time, and the talents that He has given us, what would He say? Have we been perfect in these areas, a demand that a perfect God has every right to make? Like a shrewd manager, have we seized the opportunities He has given us? Have we been always been great employees of our God?

We know the answer to these questions, don’t we? We know that we have sinful natures that are far better at seizing opportunities for our own comfort than for the advancement of His kingdom. We know where we have failed. And we know that our God has every right to tell us that we are fired from His service into the fires of hell.

God knew that, too. He knew that we could never work for Him. We are too weak on our own for such a great task as winning souls for eternity. So what did He do? First of all, He decided to work for us. Yes, God went to work for us.

Imagine Donald Trump, after an apprentice has just messed up an assignment, coming out of the boardroom and offering to do the job in that person’s place. And then, after doing the job perfectly for that person, promoting him or her and giving him or her all the credit. Sound unlikely? Yes. I don’t think Donald would dare do that. But look at what our God did for us.

He went to work for us. He came down out of the boardroom of heaven and came to this earth. Jesus went to work perfectly for us – using every gift that He had in service to God, perfectly in our place. Then He went through the toughest day on the job one could ever experience – He suffered on the cross and experienced hell in our place. Which led to what? The greatest promotion the world has ever seen – He rose from the dead! He went from the agony of the cross to the highest heights of heaven! All for you and for me!

Which means what? It means that our Holy God can sit across from us, look us in the eye, and proclaim what? “You’re fired?” Oh no. “YOU’RE FORGIVEN!!” are His awesome words to us. Jesus completed the job of winning us forgiveness and eternal life. He did the job in our place!

But guess what? Our God is so loving and generous, that He doesn’t stop there. You see, His enterprise is far greater and more powerful than any corporation in this world. His

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kingdom is growing day by day. His Word is reaching more thirsty souls each day with its life changing power – with the great news of forgiveness in Jesus. His Word is spreading further and further, slicing through the darkness and misery of this world to bring people the joy of knowing Jesus and the world to come. That’s explosive! That’s exciting! That’s powerful!

And that’s something that God doesn’t want us to miss out on. He could use anyone and anything to proclaim this powerful Word. He could have angels come down from heaven with trumpet blasts to do His work. He could have the mountains sing His praise. But instead? He wants to use you! And He wants to use me!

Shocking? Yes! Important! Oh yeah! Urgent? Absolutely! Awesome, exciting, exhilarating? Yes! Yes! Yes! Our God is so loving, so wonderful, that He wants us to share in the joy of bringing other people to eternal life. So what does He do?

He hires us! He chooses you and me to work not for Him but rather with Him to spread His Word! He gives us the incredible opportunity to use our monetary gifts to support our ministry here, and our missions throughout the world! Think of how awesome that is! We can use our money – something that we can’t take with us after this life – to support work that wins souls for eternal life! How great is our God!

And we can use our time and our talents, gifts from God, to tell others about Him! To spread His message! We can use the little time we have on this earth to win souls for the timelessness of eternity! How great is our God!

And we can join together as a congregation of blood bought souls, forgiven and loved by Jesus, and ask not, “How can we pay the bills?” But rather, “How can we use our gifts to bring others to Jesus, to win souls eternal life?” We can look to the mercy of our God and celebrate and seize the opportunities God has given us! We can ask not, “what do I have to do for this church?” but rather “what can I do with God?” to celebrate His love and share that love with dying souls who need to hear of their Savior!

And one day, can you even begin to imagine the joy that will be ours, as we see the final results of God’s work through us? Can you imagine the joy that will be ours as we walk into the final gathering of God’s corporation – His precious church of all time in heaven? You will meet souls that, by God’s power and grace, you helped bring there! Some of them you might not recognize. There might be a man from a different country that you never met, but that heard about Jesus through a missionary that your mission offerings helped support. There might be a child whom you don’t recognize, but who heard about Jesus at our Sunday School or our daycare or school and came to believe in Jesus. Or there might be a co-worker you faintly remember but who remembered well the ways you were “different” – the ways you lived your faith by your actions – and over time became curious about the object of your faith – Jesus.

My friends, just imagine how awesome it will be to stand in the perfection of heaven, surrounded by every member of God’s family of all time, and know that by His grace we had the joy and privilege to be God’s apprentices to bring some of them there. Could there be a more satisfying project completed! Could there be a more powerful celebration? No way! Could there be any more important mission? Never!

So rejoice! Revel in the awesome love of our God that gives you and me the incredible opportunities to use our temporary treasures, time and talents to make friends for eternity! Grow in that love! Go with that love! To Woodbridge! To the world!

Share with souls the life-giving memo from your grace gushing God: not “you’re fired!”, but rather “you’re forgiven”! Amen.