

Sermon – Luke 16:1-13  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
15 Pentecost – Year C  
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“Faithful in Much: Celebrating the Riches of God’s Grace”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Erika and I had some hard decisions to make. Seven years ago, we were engaged in prayerful conversation with you, the people of Grace Lutheran Church and School, on our way to mutually discerning that God was calling us into ministry together. But we had never once considered sending our children to a private school. It had simply never crossed our minds. It was clear to us, however, that I couldn’t very well serve as your senior pastor but not send my children to school here. So, we wondered what any parents would wonder in such a situation: Is this school any good? Is this the sort of place that we could trust with our children’s education and formation? On our first visit to Grace, Mr. Koehne arranged for us to meet with the first-grade teacher, as Greta would in first grade the following year. Needless to say, it took about six seconds with Mrs. Reddel to not only put our minds at ease, but to make us excited for the future. Now in our eighth school year, it’s hard to imagine a life apart from this community. Life is marked by the rhythms of Grace School, from the everyday high-fives and fist bumps shared with students in the atrium as they make their way to the Lamb Door, to that holy moment at 4:15 (and again at 6:00), between the dimming of the lights and the first note of “Once in Royal David’s City,” as we hold our breath and sit in silent wonder, waiting for the story of God’s salvation to be sung anew once more. Is this school any good? With hundreds and hundreds of parents over the past 127 years, I can say, “Yes.” This decision turned out more than

- alright, and I delight in watching our 3 children, and our 199 children, grow in faith, character, and academics, day after day, watching them discover who they are, who God made them to be.
2. Hearing Jesus' parable today, one can't help but think that the manager, the steward, would have benefitted from a better education than the one he received. He might be smart, but character isn't exactly the word to describe him. More like a middle manager of muddied morals. Like the prodigal son in the preceding parable, the manager squanders property that does not belong to him. Maybe he thought an accounting would never come due, but it always does. The rich man catches wind of the manager's shenanigans and prepares to fire him. The manager is left with one final task: prepare the books so that the rich man can see the full picture of the manager's wastefulness. His back against the wall, he conceives a desperate gambit. You have to admire his transparency, admitting that he has no interest in working an honest job. So, having wasted what belonged to his master, he proceeds to give away even more of what isn't his. He sets about reducing the debts owed the master, fifty jugs of olive oil here, twenty containers of wheat there. If his master is giving him the boot, perhaps he can grease the palms of these debtors, hoping they'll show him kindness in the future. Through seven verses, this manager is decidedly not the sort of person I'd choose as a role model for my kids. Which is why verse eight lands with such surprise. The master commends him? Having been stolen from again, the master is impressed with his shrewdness?
  3. In 1896, thirty-three families saw their vision come to fruition, a new school in north Oak Park. No longer would they need to traverse the long road, so often beset by mud and snow, to St. John's. And thank God for St. John's, who saw in this vision a chance to expand the reach of the gospel. Six years later, the school would give birth to a church. Grace. What a thing to name a church and a school! In a world that demands we measure up and do our best, our

forebears in faith had the foresight to name their community after something else. Not what *we* ought to do, but what *God* has done. Grace. Grace is at the heart of today's bizarre parable, a parable that points to the bizarre love God has for God's people, to the grace of God that barrels down the road like a school bus driven by Gunther. Who is the parable's middle manager if not Jesus himself? Sent forth from heaven's joys in the mystery of the Incarnation and wholly disrespectful according to our standards, Jesus comes to us, we who in our sin have run up unpayable accounts. And what does Jesus do? Demand that we pay up? Impress God by wringing everything he can from us? No. Jesus slashes our debts, and it's even better than in the story. Not by twenty, or fifty, percent. But all the way down to zero. Facing a ledger that will never be reconciled, Jesus just goes and cooks the books! And maybe, just maybe, the point is that the ledger was never that important to God anyway. That what God desires isn't mastery over us, but relationship with us. To clear the way for this community to spring into being, Jesus dies, taking our accounts with him into the tomb. He rises, ushering in a new world in which we owe nothing to God but praise, and lives lived in service to our neighbor. How do we make their lives easier, better, fuller? Freed from the burdens of our debt, we are invited to shrewd, creative living. God has released us for the sake of the Son. Nothing but grace, all the way down.

4. As those who carry the legacy of the past into the future, we are reminded today that everything we've received over these 127 years is a gift from God. This place is not our own, but it is ours to manage, to steward. In a little while, you'll hear from the co-chairs of Forward in Faith, our campaign to build an endowment that will support Grace School for years to come. You cannot serve God and wealth, but your wealth can work for God's mission, helping ensure that cost is never a barrier to families considering Grace for their children. God has blessed us with so much; we are called to be faithful in much. Each day, we are stewards of 199 children, each one a gift and treasure from God. Every day these children are taught by remarkable

women and men, shrewdly creative in their work. This celebration was delayed for two years because of the pandemic, but the work of Grace School didn't miss a beat. Our teachers are far too passionate and committed to let a global pandemic get in their way. First over Zoom, and as soon as it was safe, in-person, they carried on the work and ministry entrusted to them. Over the past several years, Grace has repeatedly lived up to its name. Our task is simply to make sure that the same happens in the future, for another 127 years and beyond.

5. Today, we celebrate Grace, both Grace School and the grace of our God that makes all things possible. Friends, Christ has come to us in grace. In his death and resurrection, the old ways of keeping accounts and tallying ledgers have been laid to rest. The eternal homes have opened up. New community is possible. Here, on Sundays and weekdays, we learn again and again of this grace. Let our lives be marked with creative and generous giving, and festive, faithful praise. Let us rejoice for all that God has done, and all that God promises yet to do. Is this school any good? Turns out, it's great. Even better, it's Grace. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.