

Sermon Transcript

The Library Incident

**Amos 8:4-7 and Luke 16:1-13 | Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost |
September 21, 2025 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching**

Grace and peace my siblings in Christ,

On Monday afternoon, Taryn got a phone call from the library. I had returned the kids books earlier that day, but her phone number was listed on the account and something was amiss.

She told me that the librarian insisted that one of the returned books was completely soaked (**SLIDE of wet book**). It was ruined. Since they needed to throw it out, we'd have to pay to replace it.

Taryn told her that there's no way that was the case—the books had all been in the house and there's no reason one of them would've been like that.

The librarian politely told her if something like this ever DID happen, to just come to the desk to return the book and explain what happened.

I sat quietly and listened as she told me about this conversation. When she was finished, I said....“actually...”

Before I could share my side of the story, she said, “what did you do? I just lied for you!”

Man, that cut deep. I didn't mean for this to happen! I bet they wrote a scathing note in our file with a surveillance photo (**SLIDE of WANTED**) saying “watch out for this man—he'll destroy all the books!”

My conscience was heavy. What do I do now?

While this is about one library book, on many levels right now, we're facing big conflicts. (**SLIDE of civil discourse**) Some that we engage in, some we ignore, and some that won't leave us alone.

Last weekend, the news of Charlie Kirk's assassination was still fresh and I pondered whether we, as a church, needed to acknowledge it. He was famous for being a debater and podcaster. I'd never listened to him speak. I talked to many people who hadn't heard of him before his death. We all know him now.

Sermon Transcript

I have no issue personally praying for a brother in Christ, and I continue to pray for his family, Erika and their two children, as they now grow up without a father and husband.

I soon learned that the words and ways Charlie spoke were often met with controversy. In his death, I noticed that every post asking for civility and every statement released speaking about his death with nuance was met with scrutiny and divisiveness.

I felt like addressing his death at Faith might lead to more conflict and spiritual warfare. Did I really want that to be part of our worship space?

Our presiding bishop Elizabeth Eaton in part, wrote a statement:

Charlie Kirk, known by millions for his views and videos supporting right-wing ideas, died by another senseless act of political violence. As I wrote last year, after the attempt on President Trump's life in Butler, Pa., "God calls this church to say a definitive 'no' to political violence now and in the future. Political violence has a long history but no place in democracy. This church belongs to God, and our unity in Christ is a grace-filled and healing gift in a fractured society."

As people engaged her post, I noticed something. 1. There was significant backlash directed at her for using the term "right wing ideas." Despite Kirk clearly identifying this way, many comments addressed how upsetting this was that she made it about politics.

Which is exactly what the 2nd group felt like she DIDN'T do strong enough.

And then there was a third group. The group that couldn't understand the intense offense that people were taking at her statement and who wanted to move to reconciliation, or at least shared grief at the way the world currently is.

Only a few people from our congregation reached out asking why we didn't pray for Charlie. Thankfully, each of you were gracious and expressed your opinions with care. I acknowledge that there is grief in our world that this violence perpetuates and finger-pointing only makes us fall deeper into pain.

Charlie, like you and me, is a child of God. I don't know what heaven will look like or feel like, but I do know it's real and it's amazing. I know that the grace God has extended to me on the cross is the same grace extended to Charlie.

Sermon Transcript

It's the same grace given to the children killed at Annunciation at the end of August. It's the grace that belongs to 23 year old Ukrainian refugee named Iryna, stabbed and killed on a train in Charlotte last month. Too much senseless violence has permeated our feeds—it's inundated our conversations. Our kids come home talking about active shooter drills and being afraid of what might happen. It's the same grace extended to you.

Normally, when a parable like the dishonest manager comes along, I sigh and groan (**SLIDE of dishonest manager**). This is hard, why don't I just pick the Amos reading? Can't I just say "Jesus love you" and move on?

But, in our current climate, maybe this is exactly the type of hard lesson to wrestle with. How can the manager who is fired but then cheats out the master be commended by the master for his action?

I consulted the Luther Seminary professors from Working Preacher for guidance. Matthew Skinner, when reflecting on the master's complements, said "this is game recognizing game." That, in this world, street smarts get you a long way. It's not what we expect to hear from Jesus, is it??

What Skinner said drew a reaction from Karoline Lewis. (**VIDEO**)

We're called to a different way (**SLIDE, Faith Lutheran activities**). We're called to use our wealth differently—notice, wealth isn't the enemy—but let's use our money for the kingdom of God. We're called to use our words differently. We're called to remember our values.

In the chaos of never-ending social media alerts or cable-network chatter, we need to focus on our own words and actions. What are we saying? What are we doing to promote the well-being of our neighbors?

Are we checking multiple sources to make sure we're not spreading misinformation and more hate?

How do we want our faith to be seen? Will others recognize Christ in how we describe humanity? Will others recognize our religious convictions in how we advocate for the needs of someone oppressed?

Will others believe our faith and wanna be part of this Christian movement by the way we do the hard thing—and speak the truth in love?

Sermon Transcript

So about that library book (**SLIDE of library**).

Adina is off to college, so I drive her car when I don't have the kids with me. Unbeknownst to me, there's a leak in the front passenger seat. Air conditioning coolant had dripped onto the floor and when I set the book bag down, it was in a puddle.

I didn't realize this until I pulled out the LAST book to add to the conveyor belt. When I noticed how wet it was, I knew that it was ruined and assumed that, once they received it, we'd have to pay for it. Heck, the books were two months overdue, I was expecting a HEFTY fine on top of it.

After the phone call to Taryn, I knew what I had to do. I had to return to the scene of the crime and admit my mistake. It was time to settle the bill.

Taryn said, "are you serious? You're actually gonna show your face around there after what YOU did???" They probably have video of the drop box and they all watched you do it."

I couldn't avoid the library forever. My three youngest were thrilled! As we entered, I told the kids I had to stop at the front desk first. There, three librarians were waiting. THREE?! They were all in their 20's. I was already feeling guilty, so I just started to recount what happened.

I asked the young man to check out account and see how much the book was so that I could pay for it and have my guilty conscience be lifted.

He looked at me and said, "sir, your account is showing no notes other than an overdue notice from last month. You owe nothing for a ruined book and there aren't any late fees you have to pay."

Wait, what??? He continued, "Apparently, the librarian who talked to your wife wiped out any fees. You don't owe anything."

Nothing? Can I just give you a bunch of money??? "I guess. You could make an anonymous donation to help buy more books. But you don't have to."

Oh, I did all right. When we were at the \$1 used book stand, my kids started freaking out. "Dad, why are you putting \$20 in, we're only getting one book!"

My debts were wiped away. Washed clean. I had experienced unexpected grace. The least I could do was start to give it back.

Sermon Transcript

That's how God works for us, too, you know. We're forgiven. Debts wiped away. Washed clean from these sins that eat at us.

The least we can do in this messed up and dishonest world is to know that things might be stacked against us... but we don't have to play by those rules. We can play by God's rules. Game recognizes game. Grace wins that match, every. Single. Time. Amen.