

Matthew 25:14-30
“Don’t Forget Your Calling”
Pentecost 25 (Proper 28 A)

November 19, 2023
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Jesus said: ***“For [the kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability”*** (Matthew 25:14-15a).

Our Scripture from last week, this week, and next week are focusing on the return of Jesus and His judgment of the living and the dead. We could call these weeks “pre-Advent,” since the focus is on Christ’s coming. We began this theme last week with the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Today, this theme continues with the Parable of the Talents.

The focus on Christ’s return leads to several attitudes among Christians. On one hand, we long for His return and the full realization of His reign over the new heavens and new earth. So, we pray: Come, Lord Jesus. On the other hand, this reality also causes many of us to hope for His delay, so that those in our family and others in our lives who are living apart from Jesus could have time to hear and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, we pray fervently for God to work through His Church to bring more into His fold. So, preaching these last weeks of the Church Year – to which I call “pre-Advent” – is both about an expectant hope for Jesus to return and an urgency in the Church’s mission to proclaim the good news of salvation to the lost. Today, on this 25th Sunday after Pentecost, Christ is warning His Church – *you and me* – to not forget who your Master is, so that you would be counted among His good and faithful servants.

Again, Jesus says to us: ***“For the [kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away”*** (Matthew 25:14-15).

When the Master went away, He entrusted His servants with a stewardship. First thing to know here is that the Master is Jesus, who went away as He bodily ascended into heaven. But the mission wasn’t over. The Master entrusted His servants, which are you and me, with talents, which are various gifts He has placed in our lives.

As the Master went away, the one who received five talents made five talents more. The one who received two talents made two talents more. But the one who received one talent dug his talent into the ground and hid his Master's money.

So, what's a "talent"? Well, a talent was a unit of money. A silver talent was worth about 7,300 denarii. A gold talent could be even 30 times more valuable than a silver talent. Remember, a denarius equaled one day's wage. So, receiving just one talent is a sizeable amount of money.

Now, when we use this term "talent" for an ability or a skill, that is the meaning that Christ is using in this parable, for we all have considerable abilities and skills given to us by God. These talents include intellectual and physical abilities that we are born with and those that in time develop and mature. These talents include many opportunities God provides for us in serving Him and our neighbor.

So, after a long time and ***"like a thief in the night"*** (1 Thessalonians 5:2), the Master returns and He came to settle the accounts with His servants. Each servant came forward. The first servant said to his Master: ***"Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more"*** (Matthew 25:20). Then the second servant said to his Master: ***"Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more"*** (Matthew 25:22). To these first two servants, the Master says to them, ***"Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master"*** (Matthew 25:21, 23).

Now, notice what the Master pronounces here: ***"Well done, good and faithful servant."*** You see, they had been faithful with their respective talents, and this was all their Master asked of them. They traded with the talents that were entrusted to them.

And what exactly was entrusted to them in these talents? The Gospel. It's Christ's ministry. It is Christ's mission: the Great Commission in baptizing and teaching all they knew in order to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). It is their faithfulness to the Gospel that these servants are commended for, rather than their accomplishments.

But then we come to the third servant. When it was his turn to settle his account, he said to his Master, ***"Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours"*** (Matthew 25:24-25).

Often times, our response is like that third servant. We don't take risks. We would rather do what is safe. We would rather do what is easy. It's safe being a Christian within these walls, but when we leave the church building, how often would you rather do what is easy by not showing you fruits of faith to others. The safe way, by hiding your Christian faith is the path of least resistance. Our fallen sinful nature would rather do safe things, rather than hard things, like discussing your Christian faith, inviting those living apart from Jesus to a Bible Study or devotions, or inviting your lapsed family member or your neighbor to church.

In recent years, there has been a growing cultural view that safety is our highest value. We demand guarantees of safety. But for those who live for safety alone, end up living joyless lives. This concern for safety can easily become a form of idolatry. This concern for safety is what so many fear, love, and trust in. By living for safety, we fear for our own personal wellbeing more than trusting God.

Now, this doesn't mean that we seek out danger. That would be just stupid. But if we do God's mission, if we do what He has entrusted us to do, most likely danger will seek us. Opposition will seek us, because this fallen world hates Jesus, and so you will be hated for Jesus' sake. This is what we are to expect out there beyond these church walls in the mission field of West Salem, Bangor, Onalaska, La Crosse, Holmen, La Crescent, and Sparta. Hatred and opposition of Jesus is expected. So, it is a hazardous path following Jesus in this fallen sinful world, but this path is led by Jesus who always leads those who follow Him to eternal life.

With regard to these three servants, the first two servants differ only as to the number of talents; otherwise they are identical, and both double their number. The contrast is between those who acted and the one who did not. This third servant rejected his Master by refusing to serve Him in any way.

By refusing His Master, this third servant's talent was taken away from him. Since he hid his faith from the world, by living in accord with the fallen world, this servant was cast into the outer darkness of hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30).

In the Parable of the Tenants, this third servant played it safe. He didn't tell others about Jesus. He didn't show his fruits of faith. And we must confess that we often play it safe as well. For this, repent and receive Christ's forgiveness. Turn to Christ and proclaim His saving grace to others who are desperate to hear it.

As we may desire to play it safe, there is One Servant who never played it safe. His mission was supremely perilous. This Servant knew that to advance the kingdom of God took sacrifice, His Sacrifice. It involved ridicule and danger. The Apostle Paul wrote: ***“[Jesus Christ] though he was in the form of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”*** (Philippians 2:6-8).

Jesus Christ took the hazardous path. He took the way of sorrows and it cost Him His life. God the Father sent Him on this mission that we – *in our fallen sinful nature* – could not accomplish, and He did it all for you. Through His death, He delivers to you who have repentant faith, pardon for your sin and idolatry. And His death was not the final word. His bodily resurrection is the stamp of approval of His mission and ministry. To Christ, God the Father said: ***“Well done, good and faithful Servant.”***

Remember, the Master has entrusted you with His property, which is the proclamation of the good news of salvation to all people, to baptize and teach the good news. But you may still be thinking: *“I can’t do much. What can I do?”* To this, the Master says, ***“I give to you according to your ability.”*** Today, our Master is here to strengthen your weak faith. Today, our Master is here to strengthen your ability to use your talents out in the mission field of this fallen world. Today, our Master is here to strengthen you through His Word and Sacrament. You see, it is not you alone doing the work, it is the Holy Spirit that He gives you in the Means of Grace that does His work in you!

The point of today’s parable is don’t neglect your Master who has given you various talents that He has entrusted to you to use in proclaiming the mission of God. The other point of this parable is to not forget who you are: you are a servant of this Master. This is your vocation, your calling. So, as you wait for the Master’s return, we are to serve Him and our neighbor. In this time of waiting, we use our lives for Him and His will. And when He returns, He will treat you the same way that He treats all of His servants who serve Him. He will say, ***“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. For everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance”*** (Matthew 25:20, 23, 29a). Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +