

25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
November 19, 2023  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
**A Time for Faithful Service**

**Matthew 25:14-30 (EHV)**

*“You see, the kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to still another one talent, each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. The servant who had received the five talents immediately put them to work and gained five more talents. In the same way, the servant who had received the two talents gained two more. But the servant who had received one talent went away, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.*

*“After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. The servant who received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.’ “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’*

*“The servant who received the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I have gained two more talents.’ “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.’*

*“Then the servant who received one talent came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter seed. Since I was afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’ “His master answered him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter seed? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers so that when I came I would get my money back with interest. Take the talent away from him and give it to the servant who has the ten talents. Because everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

Dear friends in Christ,

Last week, Jesus told us about the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. He was delayed but the wise were prepared when he finally arrived. Today Jesus again tells us that it is going to be a while before he returns. The man who goes on a journey is away for a long time. This time Jesus focuses our attention on what the servants do while the master is away, especially what they do with the money he leaves to their care. As we wait in the time between Jesus' first and second arrivals, it is a time for faithful service.

Let's begin with the third servant, the one called wicked and lazy by the master. *But the servant who had received one talent went away, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.*

Now, even one talent was a large amount of money. It could be worth 6,000 day's wages or about 20 years of wages. This servant was entrusted with a substantial amount of money, even if it was only one talent. But why does he bury this money in the ground? He explains this himself.

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He was scared of the master. He thought of the master as a hard man, a man who was not fair, a man who expected too much, a man who would never show mercy. Better to hide the money and give it back to this kind of man than risk losing any of it. Better to do nothing with the talent, than use it and lose it. The fear of the master paralyzed this man into inaction.

We too can be afraid to use the talents the Lord has entrusted to us. The word talent today has come to mean much more than a unit of money. Today, probably because of this parable, we use the word talent to mean the abilities and skills we have. In the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed, Martin Luther reminds us that God “gave me my body and soul, my eyes, ears and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.” But then we look around and see lots of people who have more talented minds and bodies. Their eyes don't need thick glasses like mine. They don't need to take all the meds I'm taking to keep my body functioning. They don't have the aches and pains I have. They are brilliant in math or science. They are able to create and build and be artistic but I have trouble coloring inside the lines. It seems that God has given me a one talent body and one talent mind while everyone else is exceptional. Why even try? Why use my little abilities to serve God and my neighbor when others can do so much better?

And it is true that there are others who have more money to help others and give for gospel ministry than you do. It is true that others can sing better than you and lead better than you and teach better than you and parent better than you. This can make us hesitant to use the talent God has given us. I might mess up. I won't do it as well as others. God might get mad at me for doing something wrong. God is just watching for me to make a mistake so he can punish me. God is a hard man, uncaring, unmerciful and only out to get me. I'll just do nothing while I wait for Jesus to come back.

The third servant was thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth for such unfaithfulness. The problem was not his lack of good works or his sins. The problem was that he did not know the master. He had a completely wrong idea of the master. He was condemned for lack of faith. He did not trust the master.

Through this parable, Jesus frees us from this misconception of God as a hard, unmerciful God. The Scripture is full of descriptions of the Lord our God that tell us what God himself wants us to know about him. The Lord is the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love. He is the faithful God who keeps his promises to his people. He is the merciful God who sent his own Son to pay for the sin of the world. He is the Father who lavishes his love upon us. He is the Spirit who pours out his love and grace upon us. He is the Son who is the Good Shepherd, laying down his life for sinners, only to take it up again on the third day. The Son of God gave up the use of his divine talents and almighty abilities for a time to live and die for us sinners. He did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.

This is the Lord known by the first and second servants. These two eagerly and immediately went to work with the talents they received. They were not driven to this work by fear but by love and trust. Jesus frees us to love and trust in our God in this way too. God chooses who gets five talents, who gets two and who gets one. It is not ours to question him or even to try and figure out who has the five, two and one. We are to be faithful with what God gives.

Maybe you know your talents and maybe you don't. If you asked me in high school or even in college if I would ever be a pastor, the answer from me would have been "not a chance." I barely made it through speech class in high school. I couldn't imagine speaking in front of people every Sunday. It took some time and the encouragement of others for me to even consider serving as a pastor. Many times it is easier for others to see our talents than for us. When you notice a fellow believer has a talent in some area, encourage them in it. You are great with kids. You'll be a great parent one day. Ever consider being a teacher? Maybe we simply tell someone that we thank God for them because he gave them an encouraging heart, a mind for organization, a wonderful singing voice, generosity, and so on. Look for the talents in your brothers and sisters in Christ and encourage them to use those abilities to thank God and serve others.

As you use your talents and abilities, don't worry about how much you are doing. Don't get concerned about the return on investment. God doesn't need your works. But the amazing thing about our God is that he will praise us for what we do with the talents he gives. He saves us by grace alone. He also gives us gifts and talents to use in his kingdom by grace alone. And he praises us for using what he gave. It is all by grace. Just listen to what the master says to the servants who eagerly put their talents to use.

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*"The servant who received the two talents came and said, 'Master, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I have gained two more talents.' "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

Now, check me on this, but I think the master said exactly the same thing to both of these servants. Their abilities and their results had no impact on the reward because God rewards us freely by grace alone. What better to hear from God than, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" All who trust in Christ will hear these words from the Lord on the day he returns in the clouds. Therefore, serve him faithfully until that day arrives. For on that day we will also hear "Enter into the joy of your master" and we will enter the joy of eternal life.

Amen.