

Matthew 25:14-30

27th Sunday after Pentecost (Series A, Proper 28)

Lessons for the Day: Zephaniah 1:7-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

Put His Gifts to Use!

November 19, 2017

“For it 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. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘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.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘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.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘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.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Pastor Ken Klaus, speaker on the Lutheran Hour shared a story in a recent Lutheran Hour Ministries daily devotion, that went something like this: a woman arrived at the pearly portals of heaven. A voice, presumably that of St. Peter, asked, “What is the password? Speak the password and you may enter.” The lady was shocked. She remembered nothing about a person’s entrance to heaven needing a password. She thought for a bit and said, “Is it ‘Whoever calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved?’” “No,” replied the voice. The lady thought and said, “How about ‘The just shall live by faith?’” “No.” “‘Call upon Me in the day of trouble?’” “Nope. Wrong again!” “How about, ‘I have fought the fight–run the race?’” “Those are all true sayings,” says the voice, “but they are not the password for which I listen.” Exasperated, the lady finally said, “Well, then I give up.”

“That’s right” said the voice. “Come right on in. You see, you’ve got to give up doing it yourself.”

I share that story because we may think it says the exact opposite of what our text says today. Here, in this parable we know as the *Parable of the Talents*, Jesus calls to put to use what He has given to us. In fact, if we don’t use it, we will lose it. The day is coming—and I believe it is coming quickly—when God is going to call His servants to account. Like the king in our text today, God will want an accounting of all we have done with His gifts. God gives us working capital, that we are to use to His glory—and we ask that God would help us use what He has entrusted to us wisely, that we might be faithful servants of our great and glorious king.

I’ll say it again: the day is coming soon when God will call all mankind to account before the final judgment. God expects us to make good use of all He gives to us. And He has given us so much! God has paid the greatest price for us, giving His own Son to be a sacrifice for worthless sinners like you and me. Jesus died to save us from ourselves, to save us from eternal death, to save us from hell. God invested everything that mattered—His very self in the Eternal Son, Jesus Christ—to make us something more than we were. Where once we were low-down, good-for-nothing, lower than a snake’s belly in a gutter sinners, filled with disobedience and rebellion, we are now forgiven. We have a wonderful place in God’s family, as His beloved children. This is God’s gift to us. This is where we give up on ourselves. We can’t earn our salvation. We can’t do enough to pay God back for the terrible cost of our sin and rebellion. Yet here’s the good news: we don’t have to pay it back. The debt of our sin has been dealt with by Jesus, our dear Saviour whom John tells us *“is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”* (1 John 2:2, ESV) His death was for us. He rose to live for us, and to give us the sure and certain hope of life eternal, free from the sorrows, pains and dreads of this world. Jesus lives—and we will live also. Soon, and very soon, the day is coming when we will know the full joy and glory of life with Him forever.

But until that day, Jesus is like the king in our text. He rules over all things for His Church from His heavenly throne, but doesn't leave us without something to do. He gives us some working capital and asks us to invest it wisely until He comes again. That capital is really our faith—that gift of the Holy Spirit that brings us to know and believe in the life we have in the dying and rising Saviour. When we give up on ourselves, and are alive in Christ through faith, we have a better life. Our life in Christ is a life filled with His forgiveness. It is a life that will not end, because of His resurrection. It is a life filled with hope and joy, even when hope and joy seem elusive. It is also a life in which our faith flows out in love for others.

In this wonderful life of faith we see the other gifts that God gives—from the time we have each day, to the gifts and abilities God the Holy Spirit gives to each and every one of us, to our wealth and possessions. God has also given us the good news of the gospel itself, which we are to share with others, and in this way make gains for God that will last for all eternity. A great preacher once said: “What you are is God's gift to you. What you do with that is your gift to God.” Our whole lives are given to us by God. Our talents and abilities - they are from God. Our family, our wealth, our time—these also come from God. The question that comes through our text today is: are we putting to use the great gifts that God has given to us?

In our Old Testament lesson today, God issues a warning. He says: *At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.’* (Zephaniah 1:12 - ESV) St. Paul reminds us: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.* (2 Corinthians 5:10 - ESV) We will be called before God like those servants in our text, and God will ask us: “What have you done with all I have given to you?” Please note that it is not the servant who made the most profit who is praised, but the servants who used what the king had given them as best they could. The only one who troubled the king was the servant who made no effort to use what had been entrusted to him, and because of his indifference, even the little that had been given to him was taken away.

We can easily act like this. We bury all that God has given us without ever putting it to good use. We come up with a million and one reasons why we can't do anything with the Lord's gifts to us. We are too busy, we aren't trained enough, we just don't want to make a mistake; we are too young or too old. We have so many of our own responsibilities. God doesn't want excuses—He wants faithful service. All God wants is that we use what He has entrusted to us as best we can to do what we can for Him.

When we share the good news of God's love with someone else, we are making a wise investment of God's gifts, given to us. When we come to church, to share in worship with fellow believers, we are making good use of God's gifts. When we invite someone to come with us, or when we offer a ride to someone without a car; when we go visit someone in the hospital or listen patiently to a hurting person; when we cut the grass or paint a room so that God's house would be an attractive, inviting place; when we help the LWML in their mission projects, or get involved in those Fifty for 50 projects; when we teach Sunday School; or when we sing in a choir—in all these things, and countless other ways, we take what God has given to us, put it to good use. When we realize all our money is a gift from God, and return to Him what He has first given to us, we are investing wisely, and earn real and lasting interest on our investment. And when we are called to account, we will hear those wonderful words from our God: *‘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.’*

What *are* you doing with the gifts that God has given you? You may be tempted to sit back and say that God really hasn't given you anything that you can use for Him, but His promise is that He gives gifts to each and every one of us. He gives us life in Christ. That is why Paul tells us: *and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.* (2 Corinthians 5:15 - ESV) He gives us time that can be used for Him. And He gives us the gifts that can be used to His glory. Scripture assures us: *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* (1 Corinthians 12:7 - ESV) He gives us all our material blessings, which is why Paul tells us: *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”* (2 Corinthians 9:7-8, ESV)

It is because He gives us so much that He will call us to account for all we have—or have not done. That could be a frightening prospect. But we should never forget that it is not out of fear, but out of love that we serve our God. In our Epistle Lesson, Paul said: *For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.* (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 - ESV)

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has made us His own. He has forgiven us our failures and brings us into His family. He blesses us, helps us, guides us and encourages us. And He who gives us so much simply says, don't waste

what you have been given. Put it to use. And it will pay a dividend that lasts for all eternity. Amen.