



Pentecost 24-November 15, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Matthew 25:14-30

"Responses and Rewards"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen

This week's weather gave us plenty of reminders that we are no longer in the season of spring or summer. The days are getting shorter. There is darkness when you go to work and when you come home again. There were windy days this week that if you shut your eyes and listened you could imagine a snowy blizzard outside. It was cold. Temperatures dipped into the teens when just a week ago you didn't need to wear a jacket. Then you add to the bleakness of the weather, there is the darkness in the news of rising numbers of cases of COVID-19 in our state and people we know, and families unexpectedly planning funerals after tragic accidents, yes it can be difficult to notice the rays of sunshine that pierce the darkness, cold, and gloom that seems to surround us these days.

The same might be said of this week's gospel reading. There are plenty of words of judgement like being called a lazy, worthless slave, being thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. These are unpleasant words that can overshadow words that our ears fail to hear that give us any rays of hope. However, when we look more closely at the responses and rewards of the master and his slaves in this parable for today, we can hear welcome words of hope in these times of darkness and fear.

*One of the first hope filled details easily missed was that all three slaves were **given** a large gift. They were entrusted with property that wasn't theirs to begin with. Secondly, they weren't given any instructions or restrictions on what they should do with the gift. The master gave. The slaves received. Then as we heard, the generous master went away*

*We are told that this master was gone for a long period of time. During this long-delayed return of the master, the slave who received one talent responded differently than the other two who were given the greater number of talents. The slaves that received the 5 talents and the 2 talents responded exactly in the same way. Since the master was gone a long time, they would have had time to put the talents in the bank to earn some interest while they watched which stocks or bonds might be wise investments. They could have waited until a prime piece of property became available to purchase. But instead, we learn that they went off **at once** and started trading what was given to them.*

We can also learn something from the responses that we don't hear in this parable. There doesn't appear to be any tension between the slave who had 5 talents and the one who was given 2. The slave who only has 2 talents doesn't complain about the slave who has 5 talents. These slaves don't worry about the inequity of

what was given to them. They both simply trusted the master's decision of what he gave to them. They both invested everything that was given to them without fearing the master's judgement even if they lost it all. They trusted the master who gave in the first place would give to them again. When the master returned they responded by saying "Master, you have handed over to me five talents, See, I have made five more talents." and "Master, you have handed over to me two talents, See, I have made two more talents." They both receive the reward of being put in charge of even more and entering into the joy of the master.

Notice the master does not ask for any of the talents to be returned to him. The master is the giver, not the receiver. The talents that were given were given to benefit others, not to be added to the abundance of the master.

In this story I and maybe you can more easily associate myself with the slave who received the one talent. We tend to be more careful before investing. We want to be in control of what we believe is ours. After all, our bank accounts and retirement funds have our names on them, not the masters. We may recognize that the master is indeed a giver, but after receiving the gift the ownership transfers to us and the growth is because of our doing, not because of the master's initial generous gift. Our investment of what has been handed to us is driven more by fear of losing what we have than by trusting that more will be given.

But there is little good news to be heard in this parable for being like this slave who received one talent and dug a hole and hid it. Instead of being thankful for the abundance of what he received, he is envious of those who received more. He lives in fear that if loses what he was given, he won't get anymore. His response to the master is defensive. He blames the harshness of the master for his fear. The master doesn't deliver the harsh judgement because he didn't double the investment, but because he was not a faithful servant. He was a fearful servant.

The master's desire for you and I is to take what we have received and let it grow by giving it to others. When you show God that what he has given you has doubled, he doesn't want it back, he allows you to enter into his joy and then gives you more.

This has been an especially challenging year for giving for many. We hear of restaurants closing because people aren't able to give as they did before. In our churches, we don't even pass the offering plates or even see them. Since March there haven't been any kids coming up to get noisy cans to help gather money to benefit our monthly efforts. It has been encouraging that in spite of these changes, people have found new ways to give. I have seen examples of how Baltic Lutheran and East Nidaros are more like the slaves who have received the two talents in this story. It would be easy to be envious of the churches who have more or judgmental of the churches who don't seem to do anything with what is given to them, but instead are like the slaves who have been given the abundance of two talents. Both congregations have gone out and traded in faith this year rather than in fear. The Baltic congregation has invested thousands of dollars to repair a parking lot this year. It seems a little risky to invest this way in a year when few people need a place to park. In a year, where it would be logical and practical to delay. In a year when risky investments should be feared. East Nidaros has invested thousands of dollars to upgrade a technology system without any certainty of who it might benefit. It seems a little risky to invest in something before knowing if anyone will be available to run it.

It seems risky to invest in technology that removes our control of where these words will land. This does not have to be a parable to leave you feeling guilty for being a one talent servant.

During this month when we Thanksgiving, maybe we can find new ways of being faithful servants. What if we as a parish didn't just support our individual churches' noisy can efforts, but doubled our investment by giving to both the Baltic Food Bank and the Baltic School Angel Fund? What if we wrote a check or dropped in a large bill from our abundance to these efforts rather than give from our jars of left over change? What if we gave trusting that others would make good use of what we give rather than fearing it may not be used the way we think it should? We are told how the master will respond. As he said to the slaves of the 2 and 5 talents, "For to those who have, more will be given. Enter into my joy." We are called to be faithful servants. Servants that trust in the master who provides and gives. Servants whose rewards from the master exceed our responses to God and our neighbors. Servants who believe what we pray each week, "we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us--ourselves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.