

Pentecost 25 November 19, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 25:14-30

"The Joy in Giving" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you this day from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master. Who wouldn't want to hear these words spoken to you, especially from your Lord and Savior? Even in this life, if your boss or employer has noticed and appreciated the good work that you have done, sometimes a verbal recognition for a job well done goes further than a few more dollars added to your paycheck. Having your employer tell you that they trust you enough you can take on more responsibility, even if you feel that you are busy enough already, is a compliment to the work that you have been doing and you may welcome such words. You may have heard these words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." spoken at the end of a funeral sermon. Again, we want to think that what a loved one has done is of greatest importance to our Savior. Of course, if we believe that eternal life is the reward, we will receive for the good work we have done on earth, there would be no need for Jesus Christ to suffer and die and rise again. These words from Jesus were never spoken by him to even his closest friends and they only appear once in scripture, and it is in this parable. And as we have learned time and again this church year as we have gone through the gospel of Matthew, there is always more to what Jesus wants us to know as he teaches using parables than what we usually want to hear.

There is an obvious difference in how the slaves who received five talents and the two talents felt about their master compared to the one slave who received just the one talent. The slaves that were given more were called trustworthy because they trusted their master. The slave that was given only one talent was called worthless and he feared his master. The trustworthy slaves never forgot where their talents came from. They never felt what was given to them changed ownership and became theirs when it landed in their hands. The faithful servants were never afraid to let go of what was given to them, because they remembered where it came from and was a gift that was meant to be given away.

Unless this is your first time in a church, I doubt that any one of us would argue that our God is more of a giver than he is a demander. The slaves that received the larger gifts also believed this. They loved God more than they feared him. When you confess in the first article of the Apostles' Creed I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth you are confessing that you believe that God has created you and everything around you. You believe that he will provide for you, protect you, and preserve you. You confess in this creed that he provides everything you need for each day even though you don't deserve it and he will deliver it to you without your asking. But how far are you willing to take what you say you believe? Do you believe this enough to take everything that the Lord has given to you and give it to someone else trusting that the Lord will give you what you need tomorrow? The slaves who risked all that was given to them trusted that the Lord would provide more for them and it was only then that they heard the Lord say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master." I know that I am not even close to being like the slave that received the five or the two talents, nor would I likely return even the whole one talent back to the

master let alone with a little added interest. If God gave it to me, doesn't that mean I keep what he wanted me to have?

These talents that the master entrusted to the slaves were not insignificant. We can play with what a talent might be worth by today's standards in several ways, but a talent was a measure of likely silver coins, and one talent could be worth 15-20 years of a salary. If you double it or take it times five it has great value and even the one talent is no small potatoes. In today's standards, even one talent could mean a few million dollars. When Jesus speaks of what the master is giving it does not come from the loose change that he can find from the bottom of a purse. The value of the talents is not what is available for spending after all the bills are paid and after a contribution is put into your retirement account. Jesus is talking about giving to his servants a substantial amount and he doesn't want his servants to be stingy about what they choose to do with it. The master commends those slaves who took risks. The one who hid his talent was not commended for his fiscal responsibility.

I have heard of some generous philanthropists who have plans in place so that they will be broke when they die. Upon their deaths, the rest of their substantial estates will be divided so that nothing is left. In the parable of the talents, Jesus is not talking about your generosity when you die. He wants you to be faithful in this life. You only have to turn back a few pages in Matthew when Jesus encounters the rich man who asked him, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life? Jesus lists several of the commandments that should be followed that demonstrate good deeds to which the rich ruler responds that he had kept all of them from his youth. The rich man thought Jesus was about to give him an "atta boy and a pat on the back", but instead Jesus tells the rich man to sell all of his possessions and give them to the poor. The rich man we are told went away grieving and never heard, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

I do not want to end this sermon in the same way that this parable ends with hearing that whatever little you have will be taken away and you will be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The point of Jesus telling this parable is not to encourage you to be more generous than before so that you will increase your odds of hearing "Well done".

The trustworthy slaves did not put their trust in themselves. They trusted their master. They did not fear what he might do or say to them because they knew that they could never outspend the generous outpouring of forgiveness from the master.

Yes, we know that Jesus has ascended into heaven, and it seems like he is on a long journey since he has not returned. But he is not far away. He remains near us as we receive his sacraments and hear and trust in his word. Jesus gave to each one of us the keys to his kingdom, his forgiveness of sins. We are to take this good news that was given to us and deliver it to the riskiest places knowing that we will be entrusted with even more.

All Jesus requires of you is faith in him. As we trust in him as our giver, he will surely say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Amen