

Using One's Talent  
Matthew 25:14-30

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Well here we are again in Matthew chapter 25. Last week if you recall we ended our Gospel reading with the harsh words that five bridesmaids were wise and welcomed in, but five others were unwise and locked out, cast out and refused entrance by the Lord, with the words, "I do not know you. Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." That was a tough text and now we pick up right where that one left off with another tough text. Not tough to understand or interpret, but sometimes very hard to hear and live.

It seems unfair of me to pile more harsh words up on you this morning. Its tough enough right now in this market. The market is down 60% form last year. That hits our investments and Ira, 401 which all are down significantly. The only thing really growing right now is Unemployment. Even our homes, real estate has taken a hit in how much our homes are worth as compared to last year. And while the housing market goes south, the utilities and rent and basics of life keep going up. Price of Gas is done, but that is basically because the market is slowing down, less production, less traveling, less buying. Not a light hearted / carefree time of life to live in.

But as uncomfortable as all that might be there is still yet another asset that is declining in the United States and in most modernized countries of this world. That is the gifts that God's people are given to use in our devotions and faith journeys of life. The gospel text today reminds us that we have been given spiritual gifts and we are indebted to God for those gifts. God gave us love and creation. God gave the Son so that we would be bought from sin and death which owned us all, we were slaves to it, unable to bust free. But through Christ we are given and entrusted with a freedom of grace, faith and life everlasting. God has invested in us and wants a return on that investment and yet the investment keeps traveling that roller coaster of ups and downs, and curves and free falls. Think about the deal God made with humanity. God claimed us and saved us by the blood of Christ, God did what we could never do, gave us a gift of life, of freedom, of everlasting promise, and yet what return has God gotten on that bargain? What kind of people did God redeem when Christ died for you and for me?

In this incredible grace God has asked you and me, on no merit of our own whatsoever, to become partners in that greatest business of all time. To be brothers and sisters with Christ as children of God going forth to do the business of the Good News, of sharing the resurrection promise, the victory over sin and the grave. We are to be about sharing the news that we are not tied to this world and the restrictions of this life, for we are freed into God's eternal kingdom. And

yet what return do we give back to God for this great gift. Think about what sort of bargain that was God to buy us by the blood of the lamb?

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them.” Remember that Jesus was in his last part of his ministry on earth by this point. He has gone forth sharing the news of the Kingdom of God, he has mended the broken hearted and shown love for the poor and hurt. Now he turns to his disciples and tells them that they will continue this work of the kingdom.

Investors talk about risk, how much are you comfortable with. The higher the risk the greater potential for gains or losses. The greatest risk that I see is the risk that God has given in placing the work of the kingdom of God into our hands, given us the gifts of the kingdom to use and grow the faith. Each of us here are given a place in that kingdom, a place in the work, each with our own talents. Some people can build cathedrals, some dream them up on paper. Some can sing and play beautiful music, and some arrange the bulletins and hymnals. Some greet the strangers and some visit the sick. To each one a totally different talent but each service is important to the great work of God. It doesn't matter how much your given or what your gift is each one is important.

When you look at our Gospel text you see that one was given 5 talents. Another 2 and another one. A talent is worth fifteen years of wages, so in today's terms simply based just on minimum wage, the first person is given a approximately a little over a million dollars, before taxes – a lot of money to entrust with a servant. But so is \$400,000 (2 talents) or even \$200,000 (1 talent). This is a great sum a lot of bucks even for the lowest of servants. God give s those talents to everyone, to you and I. These talents are plentiful and they don't need to be the greatest of amounts to be worthwhile. Each amount is asked for a reckoning, each is important. Our talents are plentiful in this church. This past week we have been collecting reports from the different leaders of the congregation to make a bulletin of reports for the end of year. It is amazing looking through those reports how many people, and how much time and talent many of you have given and are giving in the work you do as a servant of God. Even this week I visited a non-denominational agency in our community that does marvelous work with nickels and dimes and yes even pennies that most people just cast aside. They turn those cast offs into hope and health care and education for young women and families that need help. It is truly marvelous to see the work that people can do even from the smallest gifts to the largest, all are important.

The warning this gospel text presents to us the question of what are we doing with the gifts of the Lord. Someone once said that there are three kinds of workers in the church today, the tired, the tireless, and the retired. While many work endlessly and are tired but keep going, and

others find joy in continuing and so are tireless there are those who just retire from God's kingdom. Sure they will take the salvation, eat of the bread of life, and say they believe but have given up on doing something with that belief, growing in that faith, sharing that good news. That warning comes across very clearly in that last servant who is banished for allowing the fear of action to paralyze him into inaction. The lord judges him wicked and lazy. Did you notice this one servant didn't squander away the talents in lavish living like the prodigal son. He didn't steal the money away as did the forgiven servant who couldn't forgive. He didn't handle his Lord's affairs so poorly as to force him into bankruptcy, as did the unjust steward. No this servant just buried and let it go unused. His fear paralyzed him into doing nothing. And so the result was the wrath of the Lord, the talent was taken from him and he was thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's a tough punishment. God is serious. Human life and faith is no toy.

Sometimes we have to remember that we have been saved to serve, purchased and won from sin, from death and the devil that we might be God's own people and live in that promise as God's servants forever. The fact is that God risked all to send the Son so that we might risk to live in that salvation of freedom. So often we have reached for his salvation, and yet we may fail to hear his call to service. We emphasize the fact that in Christ we get something, but we must remind ourselves that we also are responsible to give something. To give as God has first given to all of creation.

There's an old story of a merchant who went to work each day passing by a beggar at his shop's door. Each day the beggar would look to the merchant for a little something, a donation, a piece of silver or gold. Each day like clockwork the Merchant would pass that beggar and drop in the tin can enough for the beggar to live another day. This took place, day after day, week after week and month after month. Years went by and suddenly the merchant found himself in a sticky situation. He was the only one in the shop and needed an errand run immediately. So he looked to the beggar for help and asked him to do this one service for him, but the beggar drew himself up to his full height and said, "I ask for gifts and money, don't do errands."

Yes, we are saved by God's grace. Yes, God gives to creation what it needs to sustain life, to have another day, to have hope eternal. And yet the question still persists what are we doing with that great gift, what are we doing with that blessing, what are we giving back?

It doesn't matter what talents or how many you have. Each of you are a servant of the Lord, granted a gift of the working of the Spirit. Each of us here are children of God, granted the gift of faith by the hand of the Lord. And this parable asks us to examine how we are using them. Jesus said, "It is as if a man, going on a journey summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to

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them;" God has summoned us here today, God has given us life, we have been entrusted with many blessings and rich goodness. Ask yourself today, what are you doing with the blessings of the Lord. What is St. Mark doing. What are we called to become? Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.