

Pastor Jon's November 15, 2020 Sermon

The Parable of the Talents

I remember the first time my parents gave me the keys to their new, all white, Pontiac Grand Am GT. It was for my Junior Prom. That sleek looking car had a V-6 in it... it picked up faster than any car I had ever driven. My parents handed me the keys and said, "Take good care of it and come back in one piece". I felt really special my parents trusted me with their best car. Long story short, I made it home without a hitch.

In our Gospel for today, we get the parable of the talents. This is another judgement parable that we encounter at the end of the church year about how we should wait for the Messiah to return.

In the parable shared with the disciples, a very wealthy landowner was going away on a long trip and entrusted his slaves to manage his property in form of talents. We think of talents today as our gifts and abilities. In Jesus' time a talent was simply money. A talent was worth 6000 denarii... or 6000 days wages. The earnings of a day laborer for 20 years. This is an immense amount of money. Even one talent would be equivalent to a quarter of a million dollars today.

To one servant he gave 5 talents, another 2, and another 1 each according to their ability. So they all got talents to manage, but some apparently had shown the ability to be trusted with more. The servants with 5 and 2 talents went out and traded with them and doubled their return. The one with one talent buried it and returned the one talent when the master returned.

In our Western world, letting our money work for us in the market is a reasonable and acceptable practice. It is even praised. In the first century world, however, honorable people, non-slaves, did not try to get more money through interest or trading. It was believed their increase would mean a decrease for someone else. Some Rabbis even felt burying the talent was the safest way for a free person to manage someone else's money. But the one facing judgement in the parable is the servant who buried it.

So what is Jesus getting at for his disciples and for us today?

The fact of the matter is, the landowner entrusted the slaves with huge sums of money. Maybe the landowner was greedy and wanted someone else to do his bidding for him. But in the end, the two slaves who returned double were praised and received an invitation, “Well done good and faithful servant... Enter the joy of your master.”

The third slave, who also was entrusted with much, buried the talent. It is clear he had no love for the landowner. He even said, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.” The servant blamed the landowner’s shrewdness for his lack of doing anything with the talent. His fears and disdain for the landowner caused him to literally hole up the gift. Is this slave only interested in himself... his security... and not service.

This slave was then called wicked and lazy by the landowner. His talent was taken from him and given to one of the others while he was thrown into the outer darkness. At a minimum, this parable challenges Christians to make full use of the gifts God has entrusted to us. Our love for God must translate into faithful and untiring service to other people and to the creation.

As Lutherans, we don’t like this parable. It sounds like works righteousness. And when we know that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we struggle when the third slave, who sees through the landowner, is the one facing judgement.

But there is a warning for us today. What has God entrusted to us? What gifts do we have that are left idle, kept on a shelf, or kept for yourself? What excuses do you make or who do you blame for your hiding your gifts?

Herein lies the message for us. How many of you are afraid to use our God given talents? How many of you assume someone else will step up? Our master is not the harsh landowner. Our master is Jesus. He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. God has given us a huge gift beyond measure in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. We receive abundant grace and forgiveness. This is not something to be hidden. It would be like me

saying to my parents, no mom and dad, I can't take the keys to the Grand Am because I am afraid of what bad might happen. I will take my old Mazda GLC Wagon and play it safe.

God wants us all to have the joy of our master. God wants us to use our gifts and talents to advance the Kingdom of God. So take the gifts you have been given and spread the wealth. You will find joy and spread joy.

Amen