

THE GIFT OF OUR TALENTS
Sermon for the 24th Sunday after Pentecost, 2020
Matthew 25:14-30

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Matthew 25:14-30: ¹⁴ **“For it is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ He gave one man five talents, another two talents and another one talent, each according to his ability and he immediately went on his journey. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went and put them to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ In the same way the one who had received the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ However, the one who had received the one talent went away, dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The one who had received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Look! I have gained five more talents.’**

²¹ **“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter your master’s joy!’**

²² **“The one who had received the two talents came and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. Look! I have gained two more talents.’**

²³ **“His master told him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter your master’s joy!’**

²⁴ **“When the one who had received the one talent also came, he said, ‘Master, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering from where you have not scattered. ²⁵ I was afraid. So, I went away and hid your talent in the ground. Look! Here you have what is yours.’**

²⁶ **“His master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! So, did you know that I harvest where I have not sown and gather from where I have not scattered? ²⁷ Therefore, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and, when I returned, I would have received my own back with interest. ²⁸ Therefore, take the talent away from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents! ²⁹ For everyone who has something will be given more and have plenty. However, he who has nothing will have even what he has taken away from him. ³⁰ So, throw the useless servant out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Gospel readings for last week, today, and next week are all part of the private instruction that Jesus had given to His disciples on the Mount of Olives a few days before He died on the cross. Last week, we heard the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Next week, we shall hear about the sheep and the goats. Today, we hear the parable of the talents. Jesus used each of these readings to help us learn what we need to know about the Last Day when each of us must appear before the Lord and give an account.¹

Today’s parable tells of a man who left on a journey and returned home at a later time. While he was away, he had entrusted his wealth to three servants. **“After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.”**

The man in the parable represents Jesus, who was about to leave on that long trip. In a few days, He would be hanging from a cross and paying for the sins of all humanity. After payment for all our sins, He would rise from the dead and then ascend into heaven. The parable illustrates our lives during this time of waiting for Him to return. It also illustrates the judgment that will come to each of us at the end of our time on this earth.

Note that the man entrusts his wealth to servants. He does not entrust his wealth to two servants and a stranger. The fact that he entrusts his wealth to servants indicates that Jesus is talking about people who consider themselves members of the *church visible*. Even as Judas was still a member of Jesus’ congregation, so also, we need to understand that not all who claim membership in the church are really members. As Jesus once said, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father, who is in*

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:10

heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Just as not all three servants were faithful, Jesus teaches that not all members of the church visible are faithful.

Now, it would be effortless to get hung up on the amount of talents mentioned in the parable, namely, the five, two, and one talent that the man gave to each of his servants. “Talent” was first used for a unit of weight and then money, which is how Jesus uses it in this parable. A talent weighed about thirty-five kilograms. So five talents weighed 175 kilograms, two weighed 70 kilograms, and the one, 35 kilograms. It’s a lot of money!

Although talents were money, we should not think that this parable is just about having money and how to use it faithfully. When we speak today of the abilities that people have as “talents,” that usage actually comes from Jesus’ use of the word “talents” in this parable. Jesus includes all the abilities, powers, and skills that we Christians have received from our Creator, and He expects us Christians to use our abilities in love for His glory and for the benefit of our fellow human beings. Jesus has earned salvation with His suffering and death on the cross. That salvation is not just for a few, but the salvation Jesus earned is for the entire world. This is what we are to proclaim. As His faithful servants, He wants us to tell this to the world, to the best of our ability, using the talents we have received. God’s gifts to us are beyond anything we could measure or even imagine, and He gives those gifts to all people. He expects us to use our talents responsibly and faithfully, so that we may have a good conscience when we give an account to Him of our stewardship when He comes back in glory. The Lord expects us to serve Him faithfully while His visible presence is withdrawn from us. He wants us to put His investment in us to work in the world where we live.

As the parable continued, two of the servants did put their stewardship to work. ¹⁶ **The one who had received the five talents went and put them to work and gained five more.** ¹⁷ **In the same way the one who had received the two talents gained two more.** They invested and made a return. ¹⁸ **However, the one who had received the one talent went away, dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.**

Jesus told this parable along with other parables to illustrate the final judgment on the Last Day. On the Last Day, some will stand before the Lord and rejoice like the two faithful servants. They will praise the Lord for the things they were able to do because of the Lord’s gifts. Others will stand in terror. Some of those who stand in terror are those who were members of the church visible.

When we entered the world, all of us were like the servant who stood before the master in terror. It is as David says, *“Indeed, I was born in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”* (Psalm 51:5). The Apostle Paul writes, *“You also were dead in your trespasses and sins”* and again, *“the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is hostile to God. For it is not subordinate to God’s Law. Indeed, it cannot be”* (Romans 8:7).

By nature, we, like the unfaithful servant, imagine a master who is not generous, loving, and kind. Our imagination prevents us from seeing the true Master who pours out abundant salvation and all the other gifts without calculation or measurement. We imagine the master to be **“a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering from where you have not scattered.”** This belief causes fear instead of joy. It paralyzes us so that the gifts of God terrify us, and we despise them.

Fortunately, the Father of all mercy and grace has sent His Son Jesus Christ, who has atoned for the sin of the whole world, that *“everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). God does not desire our terror. Instead, He loves us with the holy, precious blood of His Son poured out in innocent suffering and death on a cross. Jesus brought into this world a love that was priceless, a love that would not balk at the cost of sin, a love that would suffer death and eternal damnation so that the debt of all humanity would be paid and every sin would be forgiven before God. God offers this love to us with a generosity that Jesus described as *“a good measure, pressed together, shaken down and running over”* (Luke 6:38). When the Holy Spirit creates faith in us, He brings this generous love and forgiveness to us. The terror is gone. Instead, we become like the two faithful servants who rejoiced in the presence of their master. By promising a reward of grace, Jesus tells us that when we suffer because of the Gospel, and when we strive to live faithful lives in response to what Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, has done for us, He will remember our service. We shall hear those wonderful words, **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter your master’s joy!”** What God gives us can never be earned. We must not turn what God gives us into merit for ourselves. We must not imagine that we can do without Christ our Redeemer, the Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper by substituting our efforts.

The terrified servant heard different words, **“You wicked and lazy servant! So, did you know that I harvest where I have not sown and gather from where I have not scattered?”** ²⁷ **Therefore, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and, when I returned, I would have received my own back with interest.** ²⁸ **Therefore,**

take the talent away from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents! ²⁹ For everyone who has something will be given more and have plenty. However, he who has nothing will have even what he has taken away from him. ³⁰ So, throw the useless servant out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!” Matthew often recorded Jesus’ references to weeping and gnashing of teeth as unbelievers’ responses to eternal condemnation.² “Weeping” suggests sorrow, regret, and grief, the emotional agony of the lost in hell. “Gnashing of teeth” is caused by pain. It means physical agony in hell.

This parable shows that there are two judgments on the Last Day ... the joy of the master **and** the outer darkness. The other readings for this day also inform us of the terror of the Day of the Lord. The Old Testament reading speaks of screaming, howling, punishment, plundering, waste, bitterness, ruin, devastation, darkness and gloom.³ The Second Reading speaks of destruction and the labour pains of childbirth.⁴ These readings make it very clear that there will be a very real day of judgment, and that day will terrify many. It will even terrify some who claim membership in the church visible.

At the same time, there are some who look forward to that day with joy. These are the ones whom God has brought into His household of salvation. By God’s grace, they celebrate and confess the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation that God has given to them.

God’s love for us delights in the different gifts He gives to each of us. He rejoices in the various ways He has created us for service. As Paul writes to the saints in Corinth, *“If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?”* (1 Corinthians 12:17).

Our service to God does not earn us a place in His kingdom. God has freely given us that in Christ. Instead, God gives us a variety of gifts at the same time that He gives us our place in God’s kingdom. Those who rejoice in the coming Day of the Lord will readily use these gifts to confess their faith to their friends and acquaintances. Who knows, but the Holy Spirit may use your confession to bring salvation to another so that they too will one day hear, **‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter your master’s joy!’** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty and most merciful heavenly Father, You have created all things by Your powerful word. You decide the history of every nation, and direct the life of every human being. We acknowledge Your rule over all things, but we come confidently before You with our prayer and praise, because You are our loving Father in Jesus Christ.

We thank You for the plenteous daily blessings that You graciously give us. You send rain; the fields are filled with flocks; and the ground produces a rich harvest of food. You make the earth rich and fertile, and bless our labour. We praise You that You open Your hand, and satisfy the needs of Your whole creation.

But we thank You above all for the wonderful gift of Your Son Jesus Christ. We thank You that His obedience has covered our failure to obey Your commandments to love You and our neighbour perfectly. Through His death we have been set free from the slavery of sin and death, and through His resurrection we have been made citizens of heaven. You have given us the sure hope of the resurrection of our bodies. You have promised that when our Lord returns He will change our weak, mortal bodies and make them glorious like His own. Grant that, as we live out our earthly lives, we may wait eagerly for His coming, to liberate us from this imperfect world and to give us the perfection of heaven. Give us power through this hope to purify our lives and to set our hearts on things above.

Send forth Your Word into all the world. Help Christian people everywhere to rejoice in Your truth and to sing of Your love, so that Your ways may be known by all people and Your salvation received everywhere with joy.

Pour out Your blessing on our country. Grant that all who make and administer our laws may honour and fear You. Guide them by Your wisdom, so that justice, mercy, righteousness, and peace may flourish, and all evil and violence be suppressed. Give all citizens of this country an obedient spirit; lead them to respect their leaders.

Keep Your Church alive through the power of the Gospel. Fill it with Your Spirit so that it may serve You with a cheerful and sacrificial love. Grant that all Your people may follow the example of those who are leaders in the new life of the Spirit. Teach the youth of the Church to consider everything else inferior compared with knowing Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Help all our

² 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30

³ Zephaniah 1:7-16

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:3

baptised children to love and follow Jesus Christ with joy and gladness.

Give a quiet confidence to all who are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. Grant them a strong faith in Your compassion, and ardent hope.

In this world without God and without hope, grant that we may be watchful for the return of the great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Grant that we may see with our own eyes His glory on Your throne as David's Lord and King of kings. This we ask in the name and for the sake of Him who is our Saviour, Lord, and King for ever. Amen.

24th Sunday after Pentecost

Zephaniah 1:7-16

⁷ Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near. For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice. He has declared holy those whom He has invited.

⁸ "On the day of the sacrifice of the LORD I shall punish the princes, the king's sons and all who dress in foreign clothing. ⁹ On that day I shall punish everyone who jumps over the threshold and all who fill their masters' houses with violence and deception.

¹⁰ "On that day," declares the LORD, "a loud screaming will come from the Fish-Gate, a howling from the Second Quarter and a loud crash from the hills. ¹¹ Howl, you who live in Maktesh! For all the merchant people will be destroyed. All who weigh out silver will be exterminated. ¹² At that time I shall search Jerusalem with lamps and punish the men who are becoming thick on their dregs of wine, those who are thinking, 'The LORD will not do anything good or do anything evil.' ¹³ Their wealth will be plundered, and their houses will become a sinister desolation. Although they build houses, they will not live in them. Although they plant vineyards, they will not drink their wine."

¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near. It is near and coming very quickly. Listen! The day of the LORD will be bitter. There the warrior will scream for help. ¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet-blowing and battle cries against the fortified cities and against the high corner-towers.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

¹ Fellow-Christians, you do not need us to write to you about times and dates, ² because you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. ³ When people are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come on them suddenly like labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will certainly not escape. ⁴ You, however, fellow-Christians, are not in darkness, that this day should overtake you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to darkness. ⁶ Therefore, let us not sleep, like the rest but let us keep awake and be sober! ⁷ For people who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ However, let us, who live in the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the hope of salvation as a helmet! ⁹ For God has not appointed us to His wrath but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁰ He has died for us, so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. ¹¹ Therefore, encourage each other and build one another up, as in fact you are doing!

Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ "For it is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ He gave one man five talents, another two talents and another one talent, each according to his ability and he immediately went on his journey. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went and put them to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ In the same way the one who had received the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ However, the one who had received the one talent went away, dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The one who had received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Look! I have gained five more talents.'

²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter your master's joy!'

²² "The one who had received the two talents came and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. Look! I have gained two more talents.'

²³ "His master told him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter your master's joy!'

²⁴ "When the one who had received the one talent also came, he said, 'Master, I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering from where you have not scattered. ²⁵ I was afraid. So, I went away and hid your talent in the ground. Look! Here you have what is yours.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! So, did you know that I harvest where I have not sown and gather from where I have not scattered? ²⁷ Therefore, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and, when I returned, I would have received my own back with interest. ²⁸ Therefore, take the talent away from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents! ²⁹ For everyone who has something will be given more and have plenty. However, he who has nothing will have even what he has taken away from him. ³⁰ So, throw the useless servant out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!'"