

Third in a Series of Four Sermons 20:20 Vision: Focused on Jesus the Master
November 15, 2020
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Matthew 25:14-30 - Jesus said, “It will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

Two weeks ago, on All Saints Sunday, the Church was pictured as a multitude of saints in heaven whose sins had been forgiven, saints whose white robes had been washed in the blood of the Lamb, saints who were holding palm branches as a sign of resurrection victory, saints whose eyes were fixed on the Lamb of God, saints who wouldn't were shouting that salvation belongs to our God.

Last Sunday, the Church was pictured as ten virgin girls, perhaps teenagers, waiting for the Bridegroom to come and sweep his lovely bride off her feet and consummate the marriage, so that the festivities could begin. Five virgins were wise, they had planned ahead, they had taken extra oil for their lamps, and all was well. Five virgins were foolish, they had not planned ahead, they ended up missing out on all the fun.

In our text for today, the Church is pictured as three slaves who are entrusted with three differing amounts of money, slaves who were bought and paid for by their Master, slaves who were expected to do the Master's business with those talents, and in the end slaves who would be judged on the basis of their faithfulness.

Two truths we want to learn about Jesus the Master who has gone up into the heavens and promises to return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

- **Truth #1 is that He is the Master who gives generously and according to ability.**
- **Truth #2 is that He is the Master who expects a return on His investment.**

Truth #1 about Jesus is that He is the Master who gives generously and according to ability.

“It will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.”

In Jesus' day, it was not unusual for a wealthy man to leave on a business trip and be gone for a long time. These businessmen would not travel the old fashioned way - by horse or foot on land, and if on water, the boat was powered by sail or oars. While the master would be away, he would entrust his possessions to some of his responsible slaves. Keep in mind that these slaves would be bought and paid for, they were provided for and protected by their Master, they would often be well educated men who were very capable of handling his

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affairs. In fact, it was common for such slaves to have a fairly free hand in the areas entrusted to them even when the master was at home.

One slave was entrusted with five talents, one was entrusted with two talents, and one was entrusted with one talent. One scholar suggests that a talent would be worth about twenty years of wages, and so in today's market, if a high level manager would earn a \$100,000, a talent would be worth \$2 million, two talents would be worth \$4 million, 5 talents would be worth \$10 million, the total entrusted would be \$16 million. Jesus may well have been using hyperbole or exaggeration in this parable, but here is the point: Our Master has lavished grace and privilege upon His people.

In terms of 2nd Article blessings of course, God blesses us all the same. That is to say, that in terms of salvation, God treats us equally and with a generous spirit. God loved every human being equally and generously when he sent his only and beloved Son to be our Savior. Jesus Christ loved every man, woman, child, and unborn child in every generation equally and generously when He suffered, died, and rose again. The forgiveness of sins is for every solitary sinner that repents, with no exceptions. The Church is commissioned to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature in every nation, in every tribe, and in every language, in preparation for Christ to return in glory.

But in terms of First Article blessings, God treats us not all the same. By First Article blessings, Luther explains it this way, that *God has given us* our bodies and souls, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses. That in a variety of ways and as multitudes of people live out their vocations in real time, God gives us *clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all that we have*.

The standard categorization of first article blessings has been to think of them in term of *talents, treasure, and time*. Another way of thinking about talents is to think about intellectual and physical ability, Another way of thinking about treasure is to think about material possessions, and another way of thinking about time is to think about opportunities to serve.

(Talents) First of all, in terms of intellectual and physical ability, the Master treats His servants differently, but in every case, He is looking for faithfulness.

The kingdom of God is like three teenage girls on a basketball team, one has been given above average athletic ability, one has average ability, and one is below average, and yet all three have important roles to play on the team. The bad news is that one of these gals has an arrogance problem, one has a self-confidence problem, and one has a laziness problem, but

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the Good News is that their Master is also their Savior. A Savior who knows them by name and whose eyes are on them. A Savior who specializes in holding them close and forgiving their sins. A Savior who lived the perfectly faithful life on their behalf and has a plan to be with them through all the ups and downs of life

(Treasure) Secondly, in terms of material possessions, the Master treats His servants differently, but in every case, He is looking for faithfulness.

The kingdom of God is like three men in the prime of life. One is worth millions, one lives a comfortable middle class lifestyle, and one lives pay check to pay check. The bad news is that one of them has a drinking problem, one of them has a self-centeredness problem, and one of them has an anger problem, but the good news is that their Master is also their Friend. To use the language of our sermon song, When they fall down, this Friend picks them up. When they are dry this Friend fills their cup. When they are weak, this Friend is their strength. To give up, they'd have to be fools.

(Time) Third, in terms of opportunities to serve, the Master treats His servants differently, but in the case of each servant, He's looking for faithfulness. The kingdom of God is like three church members in their 60's. One of them will die suddenly at age 70, one will pass away at age 80, and one will live into her 90's. The bad news is that all three of them have those days when they wonder what their purposes in life might be, all three are tempted to bury their talents and to hoard their treasures. But the Good News is that their Master is also their Good Shepherd. A Good Shepherd who has already laid down His life for them, a Good Shepherd who knows them by name and has ordained good works for them to do in every one of their days, a Good Shepherd Who is still following them around with goodness and mercy.

Dear friends in Christ, lesson #1 today is to fix your eyes on Jesus the Master who gives generously and according to ability. Lesson #2 is to stay focused on the truth that this Master expects a return on His investment.

Truth #2 is that He is the Master who expects a return on His investment.

In this parable, the one who had been given five talents traded with them. The word literally means that he engaged in industry. He went to work. So the idea while we were given such grace and lavished with such wonderful privilege, the expectation of the Master is to get stuff done, to accomplish things, to be productive, to cultivate and bring about flourishing and fruitfulness.

(Story of my dad waking me up in the morning. Dad was a morning person. He was the kind of a man who would get up and at it early. When it was time for me to wake up, he

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would cheerfully holler up the stairs, “Time to rise and shine.” Being a typical teenager that I was, I didn’t always rise up and shine as quickly as he wanted me to. A few minutes later, he holler up a second time. Not so cheerful this time. Nothing about rising and shining. It was a one word holler that rang through the house, “LARRY!”)

The Master in today’s parable trusted that his servants would get up and at it every morning while he was gone. He expected them to hustle, he expected them to get stuff done, he expected them to make a profit with the wealth he had given. The servant who had turned five talents into ten was praised as a good and faithful servant, he was commended for being faithful over a little, he was given even more responsibility, and the best news of all, he was invited into the eternal joy of the master.

The second servant who had turned two talents into four was also praised as a good and faithful steward, he was given even more treasure with which to do business, and best news of all, he was invited into the eternal joy of his master.

The third servant who had buried his talent and brought only excuses to his master was rebuked all the way into eternal darkness. His unfaithfulness didn’t just have temporal consequences, it had eternal ramifications.

If you have parented in recent decades, then you are familiar with Elmo from Sesame Street. Elmo was heavily criticized by his friends for spending too much time in the bathtub. He had a rubber ducky and enjoyed his bath time too much.

A pastor named Seth Richardson drew this comparison with Elmo and church people these days, “Sometimes we can be guilty of just swimming in our theology bathtub, soaking in it to the point where our fingers get wrinkly and we don’t engage in the brokenness and needs of the world.”

Our assignment here at St. Paul Lutheran isn’t only to make sure the Gospel is taught in truth and purity, it is to do our Father’s business with that Gospel. It isn’t only to make sure we preserve true doctrine, it is to take that true doctrine out into every corner of Waseca County and engage with hurting and broken people of God. It isn’t just to study our Bibles and make sure our faith is strong, it is to make sure that our faith is contagious. It isn’t just to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, it is to spend our days inviting family and friends to be fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. It isn’t just to love God with all of our hearts, it is to love our neighbors in such a way that they are attracted to Jesus Christ!

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks who keep their eyes fixed on Jesus their Master as their wait for Him to return. They see all of their abilities and

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all of their resources and all of their opportunities as talents on loan for God. On their good days, they live with full knowledge that they are the blessed and the gifted and the privileged people of God. On their not so good days, they muster up the strength to go through the motions and at least to do their duties as the “bought and paid for” servants of their Master. On the days when they are listening well, they hear their Father calling them with a cheerful voice, “it’s time to rise and shine.”