

“The Good and Faithful Servant”

(Matthew 25:21)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Text: Matthew 25:21

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Come and share your master’s happiness!’

Dear friends in Jesus,

The Gospel lesson we heard this morning is commonly known as the Parable of the Talents. Essentially, it is about a wealthy man who is about to go on a long journey; so he gives one of his servants the equivalent of \$4.75 million to invest wisely on his master’s behalf. To another he gives \$1.9 million, and to a third \$950,000. Huge sums of money to be entrusted to employees in their master’s absence.

The focus of this parable, however, isn’t on creating wealth but on the different people represented in the parable. The first two men are delighted to be given the opportunity to administer their masters’ wealth and, as faithful servants, want his investment to make a good return. They seem to understand the ebb and flow of the market, as well as long-term investments.

But the third servant is different. Believing his master to be hard-hearted and unjust, he is filled with dread and hides his ‘talent’ – i.e. the portfolio he’s given – for fear of losing the lot. In the end, the master calls this servant wicked and lazy (v26) and punishes him for his disrespect. He’s not a faithful, but a fearful servant. And what about us: are we faithful or fearful servants of our heavenly Father?

Well, that depends on how we perceive God. Do we see Him as a kind, gracious, and generous God who gives us gifts to use and enjoy throughout life? Or, is He like the master in the parable: a hard-hearted and unjust God who gives gifts only to demand more than we can give?

Well, it’s neither! Jesus tells this parable not to teach us how to manage our investments or to amass huge wealth, but to teach us about our generous Father in heaven so that, as His children, we too might be just like Him: giving and living generously for others.

You see, the key to being a faithful servant is to know that true faith and joy is ours when we are not afraid of God. And that happens when we acknowledge and believe that He is good and kind and gracious toward us. As a monk, Martin Luther struggled with an angry God but the gospel final shone through.

So let's listen to what Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: 'I believe that God has created me and everything that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul, my mind and senses, and all my abilities. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day.' (Explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed). Here, Luther confesses that our heavenly Father is a good and giving God!

Think about it, my friends: everything we have is a gift from God for us to use and enjoy. And, as in the parable, our heavenly Father gives more to some and less to others – according to their abilities. You see God will not give us more than we can handle for, in Luther's words, 'all this He does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it.' (Luther's SmCat)

It's all God's gift. You see, just as the wealthy merchant took a risk by leaving his servants to manage his great wealth God also took a risk with Adam and Eve. God trusted that they would not 'eat the forbidden fruit' (Genesis 3). But Adam and Eve betrayed His trust when they listened to Satan's lies and believed that their Master 'is a hard God, reaping where He did not sow and gathering where He did not scatter.' (v24). The result was fear, not faith.

My friends, fear creeps into our heart when we listen to Satan's lie that God gives others more because He loves us less. Indeed, our hearts are tainted when we believe the lie that God isn't good, but hard-hearted and unjust. You see, when we listen to Satan's lies we shrink from faith and begin to live in fear. And like our first parents, we betray God's trust and begin to bury our hearts, our hands, and our lives in the quicksand of sin and death.

As Luther, it's in the midst of doubt and struggle that we find out more about our generous and giving God. Luther discovered in Paul's letter to the Romans that '[Jesus] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, death and the power of the devil; not with silver or gold, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own'. (Luther's Sm.Cat: Expl. 2nd Article)

You see, without salvation in Jesus' Name, Christ's return wouldn't be a day of joy and gladness, but a day like the prophet Zephaniah describes: 'a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness...' (1:15) Sounds like what the third servant was expecting.

However, to keep us from having to suffer on the Last Day our generous and giving God directed His wrath onto His only Son. There, on the cross, Jesus took on Himself God's wrath – plus our distress and anguish, our darkness and gloom, and all the weeping and the gnashing of teeth which we rightly deserve.

Indeed, Jesus suffered in our place so fear would be banished – not us. Jesus suffered and died so Satan would be crushed, and we would be set free to live as faithful servants of the Lord. He died and rose again so we can truly know our generous heavenly Father who, as Paul says, ‘did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.’ (1 Thess. 5:9,10)

This promise – to live together with him – is not just for some time in the future, but for now! For the ‘the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life.’ (Luther’s SmCat. Expl. 3rd Art.).

Having created and redeemed us our Lord now gives us His Spirit. And with that comes the gift of faith, the forgiveness of sin, and new life through Baptism. So, as members of Christ’s Body – the Church – you have been made free to use the talents our Lord has given you. You can now care and give freely; to love and serve the lost and needy.

Yes, my friends, God gives to us generously... so we may live for Jesus: here on earth and once He returns on the clouds. Then joined with the faithful of all time, you will hear the Lord say to you as well: “Well done, good and faithful servant; Come and share your master’s joy!” **Amen.**

The peace and love of God which passes all human understanding, keep our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Ernie Kiss, 15 November 2020