

I.N.I.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
November 16, 2014
Matthew 25:14-30

In Christ Jesus, who has called us to be His servants eager to serve Him with the gifts He has given us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The thought or themes for the last weeks of the Church Year are the End Times, Judgment Day, the Lord's Second Coming. Well in the parable before us this morning, Jesus tells us what we are to be doing as we wait and watch for His coming. He says we are to be active in good works, to be faithful stewards of His gifts; busy bringing forth fruits of faith.

Faith trusts in God's grace in Christ Jesus and faith will always respond to such grace. Believers will want to show in their lives that they have not received God's grace in vain. They will respond with actions of love and service. Unfortunately, our Old Adam, our sinful flesh wants to lead us not to respond with loving actions or to be lukewarm and lazy in our service and our actions. Since we are tempted to not use the gifts or talents the Lord has given us for His service, Jesus admonishes us to be faithful in our use of whatever talents and gifts He has entrusted to us and in so doing we keep watch for the day of His glorious return.

Our theme this morning is:

EITHER USE THEM OR LOSE THEM

I'm sure most of you have heard that saying before: "Use it or lose it." If you don't use the abilities you have you will lose them. If you do not make use of the opportunities you have in life you will lose them. If you have learned certain skills but never put them into practice you will lose those skills.

That is so true of a foreign language. Awhile back I mentioned to someone that in my first year of College I was dating the daughter of my German professor, who would later become my father-in-law. There were three of us in the class until early October when two dropped out. Then it was only me. You better believe I spent hours working on translating Luther's German. Unfortunately, after that year I did not take any more German classes and have not kept up my German and today I have lost most of what I once knew. That is sad, but not as sad and tragic as losing the spiritual blessings God has given us by not using them.

Jesus is the man going on the long journey to a far country. We believers are His servants. He is gone for an indefinite period of time but will return. That indefinite length of time is now. Today! He's physically unseen and in that sense gone but some day He will return. What does He want us to be doing in the interval, in the meantime?

Notice that in this parable we are called "servants"---literally slaves. Slaves who willingly serve our Savior. We were made slaves by the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, leading us to repent of our sins and trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness and life.

Prior to our conversion we were all slaves to sin, to our sinful flesh, and to Satan. We could do no good thing for God. All of our works were as filthy rags, they stunk to high heaven. We could never please our God with what we could do, no matter how hard we would try. Because of that situation we would have remained slaves in sin and eternal death in hell.

But Christ came to set us free. He conquered Satan and sin by dying on the cross to pay the punishment for our sins. He paid the ransom price for our freedom. Through His sacrifice He brought us out of the slavery of sin and Satan which leads to eternal death into the willing slavery to Christ—serving Him in His kingdom which leads to life.

But He also has honored each of us servants by entrusting us with His gifts. The Lord uses the word "talents" in our text. A talent was an amount of money. It was not a coin like the denarius, or drachma, or shekel; but it was a unit of worth. It was 6,000 days wages. Figuring 5 days a week times 52 weeks a year that is over 20 years worth of wages. That's a lot! The point is that the Lord has entrusted us—His servants---with very, very generous gifts.

In fact our Lord has entrusted all that He owns to us. All that we have, are His. He created us and gave us our abilities, our talents. He has blessed us with our intellect and reason, with our goods, our children, our work, our world and now as good stewards of His gifts we are called upon to use them for Him, in His service, for His kingdom and for the welfare of others until He comes back.

Notice that our text says "**HE GAVE...TO EACH ACCORDING TO HIS OWN ABILITY**"—no more and no less than each of us can make use of. While He is gone He expects us, His servants to use these talents for Him. When will He be back? We don't know. Will He come back? Absolutely!

Were these three servants faithful in their use of His talents? Two were, one was not. Two looked upon their calling as a blessed privilege to serve their master and a joy and honor to be entrusted with so much of His goods. One looked upon it as a burdensome duty, a pain and neglected and despised the gifts he had been given.

What was the result? When the man returned the first two servants received even more and greater blessings. The last one, who had buried his talent, had it taken away from him and he was cast out of the kingdom.

So how does this simple parable apply to us as we watch and wait for the Lord's return?

In the Church there are many kinds of service required and for each kind of service a certain gift or a number of gifts are needed if the service is to be done as the Lord directs it. Paul says in I Corinthians that there are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit; different kinds of service but the same Lord; different kinds of works but the same God works all of them in all people and to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good of all. Paul then mentions some of these gifts of the Spirit in that chapter.

But our parable this morning applies not just to spiritual gifts but to all the abilities, talents and gifts God has graciously entrusted us with in our lives. How are we going to use them—for self interest, selfish purposes or in service to Him and to others in His kingdom?

It takes different kinds of people with differing abilities to help spread the Good News of salvation to all the world within each congregation. Each congregation needs people with administrative ability; people with financial know-how; people with compassion and love for others; people who have the ability to recognize an opportunity and then take that opportunity to witness for Christ; people who have the ability to teach; people who have the gift of reaching out with comfort, encouragement and admonition; people with the ability to speak to the young or understand the needs of the elderly; people with the ability to sing or play instruments to God's glory; people with secretarial skills or technological skills; people who can clean, repair, organize and the list goes on and on. But above all it takes people who have the gift of being **AVAILABLE**. Sometimes our availability is our greatest ability.

It was for the first two servants. Never did they think that they had in some way earned or deserved their 5 and 2 talents. Nor did they think that it was theirs. It was their master's and it was for Him that they were working. And what joy they had when their master said to them "**WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT.**"

Does that mean that these servants were perfect, sinless and deserving of their master's praise? Not at all! Remember they were slaves. It was their loving duty. The whole point of the parable centers on faithfulness in using God's gifts.

So also with us! We all have sinned and continue to sin in thought, word and deed everyday. For that the Holy Spirit has convicted us with the Law and led us to seek and to receive through Christ full and free forgiveness. And that is why in thankfulness, we will want to use what God has given to us to the best of our abilities in use for Him.

The first servant put the talents to work and earned five more. The second servant put the talents to work and earned two more. The third servant buried and hid his. Are we putting our gifts, our talents, our energies, our abilities to work for the Lord's kingdom or are we hiding them, burying them?

Notice the third servant did not squander his master's talent in wild, sinful living. He didn't misplace it and lose it. He didn't enact bad business with it and go bankrupt. He simply did nothing with it! He buried it! And in the end because he didn't use it, he lost it.

He did nothing! That is what made him guilty of unfaithfulness. He was lazy; he was foolish and above all ungrateful. He tried to defend himself by saying he knew his master was a hard man reaping and gathering where he had not sown; so he went and hid the talent.

This last servant is a picture of all who call themselves Christian but refuse to use their gifts and time and talents in faithful service to their Savior, those who do not let their light shine, who do not bring forth fruits of faith.

Why? Perhaps they too feel that God is to blame for their problems in life; that He hasn't been fair enough or good enough to them. Maybe they have become too concerned with their own affairs and the necessities and pleasures of this life and therefore have become spiritually lazy and foolish in regard to

their spiritual future. They definitely did not appreciate the greatest of all blessings they had---being a servant of the Lord Jesus, working for their Savior.

We are servants of Jesus. What did that cost us? Nothing! What did that cost Jesus? Everything! It cost Him His life. He shed His blood to make us His own. He lived a perfect life for us; He sacrificed Himself on the cross for us. He endured damnation, God-forsakenness for us! We can never repay Him for this; we can only show Him our eternal gratefulness and appreciation by serving Him with all that He has entrusted to us.

Notice that the master also calls this third servant **WICKED AND LAZY!** Wicked because he was now no different than the unbelievers, those who did not live and work in the master's kingdom and wicked because now he lived only for himself.

How about us? Am I like that slave when I do not use the gifts Christ has given me for His kingdom in service to Him? Do I bury my talents? We all have at one time or another in our lives.

Thank God for this loving warning so that we can wake up spiritually and once again dedicate ourselves in service to **HIM WHO LOVED US (perfectly) AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR US.**

Paul writes in II Cor. 5: **CHRIST DIED FOR ALL, THAT THOSE WHO LIVE SHOULD LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR HIM WHO DIED FOR THEM AND ROSE AGAIN.** His life and death saves and then moves us to give our life in service to Him.

What a blessed joy and privilege it is to work in His kingdom, to be faithful servants in our callings by the power of the Holy Spirit, while we wait and watch for our Savior's return. Paul says **FOR IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU BOTH TO WILL AND TO DO FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.**

By remaining in His Word and using God's talents given to us in our service to Him in His kingdom we will not lose anything but be given the greatest gift of all—**ETERNAL LIFE WITH HIM!** What tremendous joy there will be when we hear our Savior say to us: **ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR LORD...COME AND SHARE YOUR MASTER'S HAPPINESS!**

Amen.