

Fourth Sunday of Lent - Parable of the Talents

March 15, 2015

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, MD

Matthew 25: 14-30

"What's Wrong With Playing it Safe?"

Grace and peace to you from God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

Today we heard Jesus teaching his disciples in the weeks, or maybe days, before his death. In this and several surrounding parables, Jesus is trying to help his followers know what they are to do after he has gone from their earthly midst and before his return at the end of human time. How long will it be before Jesus returns? You will not know. Stay alert. What are we to do in the meantime? God's Work. Our Hands. If "stay alert and carry on the Lord's work" was simple to do, Jesus could have put it on bumper stickers, mugs and T-shirts, passed them out and called it a day. But Jesus knew, Jesus knows to stay vigilant and carry on his ministries will not be easy, even for the most faith-filled. So he walks us passed our denial ---- "No, no, never Lord, I'll never betray you . . . I'll never forget you." And Jesus talks about the elephant in the middle of the room or the secret hidden in the closet, so that we need not be shocked, shamed or unprepared when we face challenges that will tempt and frighten us. When we find ourselves in the strife or doubts we never believed we'd encounter, we can be grateful to have the parables and guidance of Jesus teachings to steady and lead us.

We need to begin by understanding that the "talent" Jesus speaks of in the parable was a certain measurement of money. One talent was the equivalent of 6,000 denarii. One denarii was the average daily wage. So one talent was 16 and a half YEARS worth of wages. No matter your own salary, 16 and ½ years of it is a lot of money.

There were three servants. All entrusted with a sizable portion of the same master's considerable wealth, each according to his ability. One received five talents — 82 years' worth of wages. One received 2 talents — 33 years' worth of wages. Another gets 1 talent, 16 and ½ years of wages. They are to care for the master's property and wealth while he is away. Two immediately go off and use the talents entrusted to them to increase their master's wealth. The third slaves dug a hole in which he hides his master's talent.

Upon the master's return, two of the servants are jubilant, excited to give back to the master what was entrusted to them and more. The master rejoices with them, calls them good and trustworthy servants and invites them "to enter into the joy of your master." The third servant gives back the same talent he was given. He blames the master for his decision

to do nothing with what had been entrusted to him except bury it. He probably expects the master to be happy with that but, the master, who never confirms or denies the servant's harsh characterization, is clearly not happy at all and treats him harshly. Now is when most of us want to jump to the defense of this one-talent guy. What's wrong with being a saver and playing it safe, especially with someone else's money? But it's not my parable, it's Jesus' parable. In the world of this parable this one-talent guy has done something wrong while he was waiting for the master to return.

The master gave *each* servant resources to oversee. The master judged *all* three servants to have the ability to manage the resources placed in their care. The first two went to work with the resources entrusted to them. The other did nothing but bury it and wait until the master came home. In response to the confidence the master was placing in them, the first two servants worked to please their master, honoring the trust he put in them by doing their very best with what the master entrusted them. The third servant did not seem to see his master's trust as an honor but only a burden or maybe a trick to trip him up. The first two servants took some risks ---- trusting those abilities the master had seen in them. The third, motivated by apathy, laziness or fear, did nothing. Was he really afraid of the master or afraid of work or afraid of failure? Was his mistake that he would not trust himself and his abilities as much as the master did?

I don't think we can argue that Jesus is telling us to be like the five- and two-talent guys. All we have, as individuals and as a church, are God's resources entrusted to us to do the master's work until Jesus comes again. It's always been a crazy idea God has had to work through the likes of us humans ---- like the over-the-hill couple Abraham and Sarah, or a murderer and fugitive like Moses, an unmarried teenager named Mary, a somewhat thickheaded fisherman like Peter and saints and sinners like you and me. Right here at Haven Lutheran Church God has entrusted us with such a wealth of resources: a wide variety of people with varying experiences, gifts and talents; this beautiful sanctuary and useful property; money in the bank, meaningful ministries and a wide-open mission field that so needs to hear God's word of grace and hope. During this season of Lenten reflection, Jesus asks us: Are we like the five, two-talent or one-talent servant?

For it is as if the owner and president of a company decides to travel abroad. He is going to be away an extended period of time. So he says to his trusted employees, "Look, I'm going away. And while I'm away, I want you to pay close attention to the business. I know you are capable and I can entrust the operations of the company to you while I'm away. You

mange things and I will write you regularly. When I do, I'll tell you what you should do until I return." Everyone agreed.

The president leaves for a couple of years, but he writes often with instructions for how his business should be conducted. Finally he returns. As he approaches the front door of the company he immediately notices the flower beds are full of weeds, the windows across the front of the building are broken, and the receptionist at the front desk is sound asleep. When the president reviews the company's bottom line, things are even worse. The business has suffered huge losses. "What in the world is going on?" he asks his neglectful employees.

"What do you mean?" they ask.

"Well, look at this place! Things have been neglected. Other things wasted. Didn't you get any of my letters? Didn't you read them?"

"Letters? Oh, yeah sure, we got every one of them," one of the employees replies. "As a matter of fact, we have had letter study every Friday night since you left. We have even divided all the personnel into small groups and discussed many of the things you wrote. Some of those things were really interesting. You'll be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter or two! Great stuff in those letters!"

"Okay, okay you got my letters," says the exasperated president, "you studied them and meditated on them, discussed and even memorized them. But what did you **do** about them?!"

"Do?" says the employee. "Uh . . . we didn't DO anything about them."¹

Our Lord has communicated with us in the Bible . . . and even more perfectly in Jesus. Our Lord has provided new life at the font and food for the journey at the altar. Our Lord has entrusted each and every one of us and this church with many blessings and gifts. What will we say when the master returns to ask, "What did you DO about it?" Let us trust ourselves as much as God has trusted us. Let us use what has been entrusted to us to fearlessly step out in faith to bring Jesus into our world and more people to Jesus. Let each us love the Lord with all our hearts and souls and minds so that it becomes our deepest, most profound desire to hear our Master say, "Well done, my good and trustworthy son, my good and trustworthy daughter." Amen

Linda M Alessandri 3/14/15

ENDNOTE

1. adapted by Steve Jackson from a story he read by Charles Swindoll in Improving Your Serve in his own sermon posted at www.newsongweb.org/sermons/2005%20sermons/4-2405html