

Pentecost 24 11/15/20
Matthew 25:14-30 28A

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 25TH CHAPTER OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

For many years, I was a devoted fan of Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion". "Prairie Home Companion" was a radio broadcast on public radio that poked fun at small-town life in the fictitious Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, "where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average".

One of the show's main sponsors was the made-up "Powdermilk Biscuits". Every show featured the Powdermilk Biscuit jingle and Garrison Keillor would extol Powdermilk Biscuit's virtues with these words: "They give shy persons the strength to get up and do what needs to be done."

In the Parable of the Talents before us this morning, Jesus teaches us that He gives us all the talents we need to get up and do the work that needs to be done in our Lord's Church. The question the parable puts before us this: Do you have **faith** in the works God has given you to do?

It's still Tuesday of Holy Week. The previous Sunday, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on the back on a donkey. As He was teaching, He foretold the destruction of the Temple. His disciples asked Him, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (24:3). And as He teaches them about the end of time, He tells them the parable about a man going on a journey and, as was the business custom of the day, he entrusts his talents to his servants.

Pretty obvious what the Parable is all about. Jesus is the master and He's going away. At His ascension, He's going to return to the Father in heaven. The servants – that's you. You are His servants. All things

belong to Jesus, as John says in his Gospel, “All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (1:3). That’s why He can give it to you. They are His to give.

Things like forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And, practical things like clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, medicine, hot water heater, your warm Aaron Rodgers pajamas and your cozy Green Bay Packer blanket.

And, Jesus gives to you all the things you’re good at. Things like music, operating heavy equipment at a coal mine, cooking, balancing a check book, running the snow blower. He also gives to you your stations in life – a son, a daughter, mom or dad, grandparent, employee, employer, student, citizen. Whatever you do, Jesus has placed you in that vocation. And, He gives according to your ability, because He knows what you are capable of; He knit you together in your mother’s womb, after all.

Like the master in our parable. He gives to one servant 5 talents, another 2 talents, and to another 1 talent. And inquiring minds want to know: how much is a “talent”? By its strict definition, a talent is 6,000 days of wages. A day’s wages was a denarius, so 1 talent is 6,000 denarii. Clear as mud, right? It is hard to put into exact figures what that means for us today, because in our world we work with a 40-hour week, and overtime, and holidays and holiday pay, which the people of Jesus’ day knew nothing about.

But, maybe we can look at it this way: Thanks to Google, I can tell you that in 2018, the average household income in Mercer county was \$ 79,890. Given 6,000 days income, that would be somewhere between 21 and 22 years of wages, so figuring for 21 years of wages, based on that average, 1 talent = \$1,677,690. 2 talents = \$ 3,355,380. And, 5 talents =

\$ 8,388,450. My point is this: when Jesus gives, He gives abundantly!

He gives you everything you need to fulfill the duties of the vocations He has placed you in. All the ability, all the talents, all the opportunity Jesus has given you, you use for the good of your neighbor and to the glory of God.

So ... How's that working out for you? Are you taking all the stuff that Jesus has given you and using it to the good of your neighbor and the glory of His holy name? The reason I ask is because Jesus is going to ask when he comes again to judge the living and the dead. That what He means when He says in the parable, "Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them" (v. 19).

The servants who had been entrusted with the 5 and the 2 talents immediately put it to work, earning more for their master. When he settles accounts with them, he says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (vv. 21-23).

Then, there's the servant who had been entrusted with the 1 talent. He doesn't use it for the good of His neighbor. He does use it to glorify God. He takes the 1 talent and digs a hole in the ground and buries it.

Much like the talents, and gifts, and stuff and opportunity that God has entrusted to you. You just want to dig a hole in the ground and bury it. You are not happy with that God has given to you. In fact, you may be ashamed of it; after all, what glory is there in changing a diaper? The world doesn't think that's wise. You just want it to go away.

It's not like what your neighbor has. Your neighbor got more talents than you did. They have more money; a bigger house; they get to be the boss at work; they can hit the golf ball farther and straighter than you can,

and you are jealous. They're admired in the eyes of the world. You're not content, you want the talents, the abilities, the opportunities that your neighbor has.

Look at the how the master settled accounts with the servant who was entrusted with the 1 talent, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ... cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 26,30).

The Good News of the Gospel is that you will never hear those words from the master. He knows you have not used all the things He has entrusted to you to help your neighbor and glorify Him. You have taken the stuff you have been given and served yourself, your own ego. You deserve to be cast out into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But, you will not be cast out into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, because your Master is kind and loving. He sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus, to be cast upon the cross for you. The punishment you deserve for all your sins, He bore upon His own body. There He was abandoned by God. There He gave His own life into death so that forgiveness would be yours. The 3rd day, He rose from the dead to give you the forgiveness, life, and salvation He won for you through water, and bread and wine, and the Word that is read, preached, and heard.

Which brings us to the parable in our Gospel for this Sunday. In the parable, the talents represent the gifts, and the abilities and the stuff and the opportunities that God has given each of us. The fields are white for the harvest, so God has given each of us talents to harvest souls for Him. And remember, when God gives, He gives abundantly!

Let us learn from the faithful servants in our Lord's parable. They had no more than received their talents, when they immediately went to work. They had faith, faith that their labor for their master was not in vain, faith in his promises, because they knew him to be kind and loving. As we wait for our Lord to return as a thief in the night, God assures us that our faithful labor for Him is not in vain.

Which is why we pray this Sunday,
Almighty and ever-living God,
You have given **exceedingly great and precious promises**
to those who trust in You.
Dispel from us the works of darkness
and grant us to live in the light of Your Son, Jesus Christ,
that our faith may never be found wanting.
(Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book. St. Louis, Concordia, 2006)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.