

## Investing the Talents

*Matthew 25:14-29 ~ February 26, 2017 ~ Heritage Lutheran Church*

The text that we are addressing today is called the parable of the talents. I'm going to start with a story about my 7 year old granddaughter Meredith. You are on your own to compensate for a proud grandparent, but I think you will see this story as a modern application of Jesus' Parable.

Meredith got home from Korea last summer just in time to get in on Vacation Bible School. She participated enthusiastically, but was dismayed when several children said they would be unable to sing on Sunday. Neither her parents nor her grandparents had any clue how much this was bothering her, but we found out later on Friday.

About midafternoon Meredith came up from the basement in our house and announced, "I'm a mini-missionary, I'm going to go door to door in our neighborhood to find people that will help us sing the VBS songs on Sunday." Ever gentle and not wishing to squelch such an obvious response to the call to go, make, baptize, and teach, her parents asked her to come up with a different plan for her mission to our neighborhood.

Back to the basement with a military air, Meredith prepared her next sally for the Kingdom. When she emerged from downstairs this time she was equipped with a small placard and two hand written forms to rally the neighborhood to our need here at Heritage. She went out and sat in a chair at the end of our drive way. Every time a car would pass she would flash them with a sign that read, "Our Church Needs Help!!! Forms for free." Kris has carefully preserved the forms so I can share exactly what they said with you. The forms read:

*You are signing this piece of paper because our church is running out of children for singing in church this Sunday Only. So if you would dig in and help that would be great.*

*When: This Sunday only.*

*Where: Heritage Church, 117 Sandstone Ave.*

*Return the form by Saturday June 11<sup>th</sup>.*

There were checkboxes at the bottom for, "I can help" and, "I cannot help."

After an hour in the 96 degree weather, her parents called her in for supper. She was discouraged about the lack of response, but her parents praised her good effort. The

next morning we discovered that she had spent most of the evening crafting a colorful sign on our drive way in sidewalk chalk which read, Our Church Needs Help! And the forms were left on the chair free for the taking.

Now with this little story in mind let's consider the parable Jesus uses in today's text to teach about faithfulness.

***For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.***

First it is important to realize that Jesus is using this parable to teach his disciples privately. This feature is important because it alerts us that this is not the kind of parable where Jesus is hiding the truth inside a verbal puzzle. He is openly teaching his disciples about the nature of faith and their role in the work of the kingdom after he departs. One cannot miss the foreshadowing in the stories opening line, ***“For it will be like a man going on a journey...”*** Clearly Jesus is showing them the future of the church while he is away in Heaven before the coming Day of Judgement. This makes the parable of vital interest to all of us, because it speaks of the reality we find ourselves in as we await Christ's return.

***To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.***

Something that might escape us about this parable is just exactly how much money the master actually gave to his servants. The Biblical measure for a talent is a weight. The weight of a talent was roughly 75 pounds. Now Jesus story doesn't designate exactly what the master was giving, but it was likely either silver or gold. If it was silver, the value of a single talent today would be over twenty thousand dollars. If it was gold, the value of that same talent would be over one and a half million dollars. So the distributions were somewhere between twenty thousand dollars and seven and a half million dollars. On either end of that spectrum there was a great deal of money involved. And Jesus' disciples would have sat up and paid attention to what he was saying. This parable was about serious business.

In Jesus story, there were three allotments; one for five talents, one for two, and one for one. Jesus says that the reason for the differences in allotment had to do with the Master's understanding of his servants abilities. And this actually makes sense with the most money going to the most capable.

It is clear from the beginning of the story that the master wants his servants to use this gift of capital to engage in business activities. The trust between the master and his servants is the true power behind the arrangement. The master in the parable has decided to put a significant portion of his wealth into the hands of his servants. He also gives them his trust to do whatever they think best. The servants, on the other hand, need to trust the Master's word to freely engage in business ventures. It is a risk both ways. It is an opportunity both ways. It requires mutual trust, self-confidence, and most of all acts of faith.

***He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.***

Now we come to the most important moment in the parable. This is where the action takes place. The master has departed. The Servants are choosing what to do with the huge amount of money that their master left them. The two with the most ability begin to use the funds immediately to do business. But the third servant feels terrified by the options and decides to keep the capital as safe as possible. So he buries it, hiding the talent to protect it from any risk.

Now let's step back and look at this situation carefully. Do you think that the difference between the three servants is strictly ability? Did the servant with five talents and the one with two enter into business just because they were more skilled? And did the third servant hide his talent out of lack of ability to do anything else with it? This would be a misunderstanding of the parable. Certainly the third servant had enough skill to invest his talent with the bankers as his master later points out. So, this parable is not about skill. This parable is about faith. Faith is the ingredient that changes between the first two servants and the third one. The first two servants trust their master and trust themselves. The third servant trusts neither the master nor himself. The first two servants see the opportunity beyond the risk. The third servant is frozen by the risk itself. The first two servants take action for their master's business based on their faith. The third servant hides his talent taking no action because of his lack of faith.

***Master, ... I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent ... But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! ... you ought to have invested my money with the bankers...***

We are acutely aware of the master's response to these three servants upon his return. The first two are praised and the third is rebuked. But what is at stake is not money or ability. What is at stake is faith. The phrase, "**cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness...**" foreshadows the coming Day of Judgment. There can be no mistaking the long term significance of this parable. This parable is about the work of the Christian Church in the world. It is about our participation in that real life work. The investment resource Jesus gives us is called grace. It is the most costly grace ever imagined purchased with the suffering and death of Jesus. It is the totally free grace of God that grants salvation to all who believe. It is a treasure of unspeakable worth. But it has a vital relationship with faith. By faith we invest that grace in the lives of others. By faith we take the treasure of grace and put it to work in the lives of other people.

Remember the mini-missionary Meredith? With the writing capability of a first grader, some scraps of paper, and side walk chalk she reached out with the Gospel. Her version of the gospel was "Our Church needs help!" To a world full of unneeded people, there is no greater gospel than, "Our church needs help!" The grace of God is that we are all needed. The grace of God pays its dividends in lives transformed from unneeded to needed, from undesirable to desired, from lost to saved.

We are Christ's servants who have been given tons of grace. It is grace that is powerful, unconditional, and ready to go. It is far more valuable than silver or gold. What are we doing with it? How are we going to invest it in the work of the Kingdom? This is not a theoretical question. We stand at a crossroads. We have the resources. We have the endless grace of God at our disposal. Will we reach beyond ourselves to extend that grace to a world which so desperately needs it? Or will we hide that grace inside the mediocrity of our culture's standard brand of religion? Like the three servants in Jesus's parable, it is up to us.

The cross is full. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and leading us out to go, make, baptize and teach disciples. Let us take up our cross and follow him.