

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28A)

November 19, 2017

Text: Matthew 25:14–30

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God's Word is clear and forthright in telling us believers in Christ Jesus two most important truths. First, Jesus promises to come again in glory on the Last Day but we do not know when that will be; that has not been revealed to us. Second, we are to be faithful until the Lord's return; to be ready whether the Lord comes soon or late.

Did we not hear last week in the parable of the 10 virgins that the bridegroom came at the midnight hour? The virgins' one task was to be ready for the coming of the bridegroom whenever he decided to begin the wedding celebration. Today's parable of the talents describes a master giving large gifts to his servants, then he leaves, and doesn't return for "a long time" (vs. 19). The job of the servants was to be faithful with the master's gifts until he returns, whenever that may be. The apostle Paul forthrightly declares, "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (I Thess. 5:1–2). You never know when a thief plans to come; he doesn't post an event announcement on Facebook or mail a save the date postcard. Be that as it may, we are admonished to "keep awake and be sober...having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet of salvation, the hope of salvation" (I Thess. 5:6–8).

We, the redeemed of the Lord, are told Jesus is coming again. But the day and the hour are not known. Therefore, be faithful in your day to day living and be ready for our Lord's return. At all times, in all circumstances, without distraction or falling into neglect; stay awake and be sober, knowing the times in which we are to remain faithful and ready. We have exceedingly precious promises that the Lord Jesus will preserve us. Paul writes in Philippians 1:6, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." But Paul adds this solemn admonition in Philippians 2:16, hold "fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain." The Lord Jesus will keep us until His glorious return. Believe His word; He will not fail. But hold fast and remain faithful lest the Church's ministry in your lives be in vain.

That's the take home message for today's sermon: Be faithful to the Lord and His gifts. Until He calls you to your eternal rest and victory, be faithful. There is much that we face in this life that tempts us to be unfaithful. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh do not want to hallow God's name or let His kingdom come among us. Does not the Small Catechism admonish us that when we pray "deliver us from evil" we are asking "God to guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice"? In today's parable, we will see how false belief, despair, and greater forms of shame kept a gifted servant from entering into "the joy of the master."

The parable of the talents is another parable about the kingdom of God. These words of admonition and instruction are for us who confess the name of Jesus as Lord and master. This parable speaks to us as the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

According to the parable, a master grants his three servants extravagant gifts, talents they are called in the parable, the largest measure of money in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. And then the master goes on a journey, evidently with no notice as to when he will return. Vs. 19 describes the master being gone for a "long time." The master represents Jesus; the three servants represent Christians, followers of Jesus. The talents, those extravagant gifts, represent all the blessings we receive from God as they are revealed to us from God's Word. They are the master's property entrusted to His servants (vs. 14). And just so we're clear, the "long time" mentioned in the vs. 19 refers to the time between our Lord's ascension and His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. We are living in that "long time". So this message applies to us most directly and specifically.

In the parable, three servants are all gifted with the Lord's property "to each according to his ability" (vs. 15). The master gives to us, His servants, the right amount of blessings. Not too much, not too little. The point is important. For the Lord does not give us anything that is detrimental or dangerous to our ability to be ready and faithful. The gifts are given in the right amount so that we can live faithfully.

Never should we think that the Lord hasn't given us enough in His Word, baptism, absolution, and the Sacrament, prayer, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and all His gifts. So much in modern Christianity operates from the assumption – sometimes stated, sometimes not – that God's Word is insufficient or unclear to be the only source for doctrine, faith, and life. It must be supplemented with philosophy, human wisdom, modern science and sociology, techniques and strategies that pander to humanity's fallen desires and appetites. The temptation to use means other than the faithful

preaching of God's Law and Gospel and the right use of Christ's Sacraments to make Christian disciples and to build up Christ's holy Church are many.

For a few moments, I want to focus upon one gift that God the Father has given to us: His holy Word. The psalmist declares, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105). Each of you, according to your abilities, has received the precious gift of God's Word. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to create and sustain saving faith in Jesus. Through God's Word, the Holy Spirit creates within us a new heart and a new mind so that we desire to live faithful and godly lives.

Let God's Word dwell richly deeply in your day to day lives. Combine prayer with the regular reading of God's Word in your homes. Single Christians, pray at home while reading God's Word. Husbands, worship with your wives; wives, join your husbands in prayer and the reading of God's Word. Parents and grandparents, lead your children and grandchildren in godly and faithful worship at home. Build a family altar, so to speak. There is no greater gift you can give to your children than a home filled with Words and praises of God. A godly legacy is priceless beyond measure.

There are many resources you can use. But most of them are already at your fingertips: your Bibles, your hymnals, and your catechisms. Use the various prayer offices included in the hymnal: matins, vespers, the daily prayer liturgies, the litany, and so forth. They provide a beautiful structure for home worship. Learn our Lutheran hymns so that "the word of Christ can dwell in you richly as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). I can provide you with a list of hymns that will be used in the worship services. And follow a lectionary that provides a structured, regular schedule of Bible readings. Review the catechism. Commit it to memory again; it's not just for youth confirmation classes, you know. God's people have used these gifts for centuries. They have stood the test of time and will not fail: Bible, hymnal, and catechism.

Listen to King David's words of praise about God's Word from Psalm 19:7–11. May they encourage you in your worship in church, to be sure, but also at home:

<sup>7</sup>The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

<sup>8</sup>the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

<sup>9</sup>the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup>Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

By God's grace and according to the ability given to each of us, may we use our Lord's gifts so that when He returns we may say, "Master, you delivered to me (these talents); here I have made (these talents more)." To which our Lord Jesus will say to us, "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."

But there is a stern warning in today's parable. One gifted servant – a Christian, a believer in Christ – did not use his gifts faithfully. He let fear and sloth keep him from using his gifts faithfully. He did not experience the "joy of his master." In fact, he hears a stern rebuke, "You wicked and slothful servant!" (vs. 26) and a fearful condemnation, "Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vs. 30). Beware, saints of God. Do not let the devil, the world, and your sinful nature deceive you or mislead you into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

I commend you all for being here today to hear God's Word and to receive His gifts of eternal life, forgiveness, and renewal in the Holy Spirit. Be encouraged and strengthened in the riches of Christ. The Holy Spirit drew you here today to receive talent-sized gifts. Receive them. They are yours by Christ's grace.

I also encourage you to build your home altars so that you might be faithful in the use of God's Word. We do these things as Christians, as the redeemed of the Lord who desire to be ready when Christ comes again. Enriched with His promises and strengthened by His grace, stand firm in hope of salvation knowing the days are growing shorter; the Lord may return at any hour. Clothed in the splendor and beauty of Christ's righteousness, walk faithfully to the eternal praise of our heavenly Father.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.