

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Sunday November 15, 2020

Zephaniah 1: 7, 12-18; Psalm 90: 1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11; Matthew 25: 14-30

May the words of the mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord my strength and my redeemer!

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Have you ever been afraid to use your gifts, talents, or skills? Have you ever thought that your skills and talents were not appreciated by other people? If the answer to either one or both questions is “yes”, then you can probably sympathize with the third slave in the Parable of the Talents, which is in Matthew 25:14-30

The word “talent” represents all the opportunities God has given his people to serve him. Talents include wealth, abilities, lifetime, resources, time, money, energy, affections, and so on. The parable teaches us to invest everything God gives us for his glory. If we want to be faithful servants of Christ, we must use what he gives us to spread the Good News. If we are faithful stewards in this life, we will be rewarded with even greater responsibility in the next life. The reward will be in proportion to the tasks we have accomplished. Sometimes when we do God’s work, we will not feel appreciated. When we feel that what we are doing for God is not appreciated here on earth, all we have to do is pray to God. When we please him, we are doing our daily job. The greatest reward God can give will go to godly people who have labored faithfully without any earthly recognition.

God is both a generous rewarder and a strict judge. He evaluates our stewardship on the basis of how well we administer the responsibilities and talents he has given us. He evaluates our stewardship based on how well we have kept His priorities instead of our own. If we use his gifts to spread the Good News, we will be rewarded. If we don’t, we will be punished by being separated from him for eternity. We must master and receive the gifts God gives us, including the gift of time. No matter how old or how young we are, we can still use the gifts God gave us. Even when we are sick, God can still use us. If we master and use the gifts God gave us, we will have plenty of time to grow in faith and spread God’s Kingdom here on earth. One of the most important gifts we have is our salvation. Sometimes we take it for granted, and sometimes we treat it like one of our most prized possessions. Sometimes we treat it with reverence and respect when we are first saved, but sometimes over time we take it for granted. That is the wrong attitude to have. The gift of salvation is a gift from God, and we are to use it just as we use all of the other gifts, he has given us.

Another one of the gifts God has given us is the Gospel. He gave us that gift not so that our ability to spread it can be put to good use, but so that our inability is exposed, and God is glorified. We can’t, but God can. Christ demands faithfulness. If we are faithful, we will produce results. God created us with a deep desire to be productive. If we do not use what God gave us, we will lose everything. We are to dedicate ourselves and all we have been given to Christ so that he can multiply those gifts. Jesus seems to imply that there will be a long period of time between his first coming and his second coming, but the delay does not mean that he will not be coming. We are duty-bound to expand God’s kingdom in his absence regardless of how long we have to wait for him to return.

God sees everything from the beginning to the end, even if we can't understand things. He sees our motives. He sees how we handle even the smallest of things, and our future depends on the little things. Contrary to what a popular saying says, we must "sweat the small stuff." So how can we know what God wants us to do? It's simple. We have to read the Bible. If we do, we will discover that God does not want us to play it safe. He wants us to take risks. No risk, no reward. We have to risk living the life Jesus taught us to lead instead of the life the world wants us to lead. There are lots of lessons to be learned from the Parable of the Talents: Be good stewards of your abilities. Use them or lose them. Don't be afraid to try. Never say, "I have so little, my contribution won't matter." Every little bit helps. People may not be equal in talent, but they can sure be equal in effort. The faithful servants gambled with the master's goods in pure blind faith, and that was really what he meant for them to do. They yearned so completely, in other words, that they believed his intentions—his spirit, if you will—as they understood it, and they gambled themselves on fulfilling it. They loved the master with all their hearts and souls and minds, for this is the first and great commandment, and all the others are secondary unto it. The only proper response to such stories as these is to pray that God may give each of us such grace and faithfulness in our times as he gave to those faithful servants.

We are getting closer to the end of the church year. In fact, as I deliver this message, in less than three weeks' time we will be starting the season of Advent. Advent is a time to remember Jesus' birth in the stable in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. It is also a time to prepare for his Second Coming, and Matthew 25 talks about being prepared for the coming kingdom. When God comes to judge us, will we be afraid that we will be cast into the fires of hell? Are we being too cautious when it comes to serving God? Are we afraid of failure? Are we afraid of taking the chances that discipleship requires? The Parable of the Talents encourages us to take bold, risky action. The Parable of the Talents is about trust. God trusts us to use the gifts he has given us to spread his kingdom here on earth. He calls on us to return the favor by acting on the gifts he has given us out of trust. God has blessed us so much that we can't lift our bushel baskets on our own. God only asks that we use, spend and grow our resources, including our talents. He only asks that we love him enough not to hoard or hide our resources. We can trust him. Can he trust us?

Whatever talents God has given us, including opportunities He gives us, He's looking for us to respond with joy and eagerness. And as we do, we find greater purpose in our lives. We reap joy and satisfaction, regardless of how much or little money or fame or recognition we receive. In Christ, we are freed from laziness and equipped and empowered for wholehearted service. Dear friends, let us live and work every day in the certainty that Jesus will say to us, Mt 25:21 "...Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things... Come and share your master's happiness!

God has given you certain unique talents (personality, gifts, resources, spheres of influence). Use them to spread the love of Jesus. Use them to witness of Jesus' generous, gracious character. Use them to be his hands and feet to go to the hurting, the broken, the outcast. Invest them to help people come to know Jesus. God has given you the ability to pray (and He hears you). Pray for people to know Jesus. People entering the kingdom of heaven is what the kingdom of heaven is all about. It's why Jesus came, and why he sends us. Let's recommit ourselves in 2020 to invest in people for the gospel's sake with new vision and passion.

Let us pray. Father God, thank You that you've given us talents, abilities, gifts, skills and opportunities. You've given us such a great privilege, even the privilege of living in such a beautiful area. We know that

with privilege comes responsibility. Help us make our lives count. Help us not be those who are simply living for today but help us live for eternity. Our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. We humbly thank you for your lavish grace and mercy to us. We thank you for the abundance of the gifts, talents, resources, opportunities and time you have given us. Help us to receive them with gratitude and use them for your glory. **In Jesus' name. Amen**