

Matthew 25:14-30- Nov. 15, 2020

- Today's gospel lesson from Matthew has Jesus telling another parable.
 - A story Jesus tells as a metaphor for explaining something to his disciples.
 - In this case, we are introduced to the slave owner, or master, and his slaves - three of them.
 - And what is done with the talents entrusted to them when the master leaves.
 - One slave is given 5...
 - One is given 2...
 - One is given one...
 - The slaves with 5 and 2 talents go out and trade them, making five more and two more, respectively.
 - But the slave that is entrusted one...what does he do?
 - He went and dug a hole, burying and hiding the one talent.
 - And what happens when the master returns?
 - He's pretty happy with the first two slaves.
 - In fact, so happy, that the master entrusts them with more things.
 - But the third slave?
 - That poor third slave - so frightened and vulnerable.
 - He's afraid of sticking his neck out.
 - He's afraid of how he will be judged.
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- New Testament scholar and Luther Seminary professor Matt Skinner discusses on a recent podcast that this is one of his favorite parables...but that it is also one of the most misunderstood.
 - Because of the word "talent", many people tend to think that Jesus is talking about the talents, or gifts, that people have.
 - This parable is not totally and completely about that.
 - Skinner jokes that it's not about the person who used to play the flute in middle school and, since that's the best that he can do, then he should play the flute in worship and share - not bury - his one talent.
 - In this parable Jesus is speaking about a crazy amount of wealth: just one *talanton* alone was equivalent to roughly thirty *pounds* of gold.

- The parable's use of absurd monetary values is meant to shock you again and again,
- underscoring the fact that Jesus' followers possess extraordinary opportunities to advance his work of blessing the world.
- But not with money or "talents"
- This parable, Skinner comments, is about callings...it's about the positions that God has placed us
- so we can make a difference in the world...the opportunities we have to be influential.
- We may like to think that we are the slaves with the 5 talents...or even the one who has 2.
- That we go out and utilize the positions that God has placed us in to make a difference ...
- And, many times, we are given those opportunities and DO use them - and oh, how they multiply...
- But I am sure you know where I am going next with this...
- if we are being honest with ourselves, we are - more often than not - acting much more like the slave with the one talent.
- Burying the opportunity we are given...not taking action like God is calling us to do as Christians.
- To be like the third slave is maybe being too scared to step in, or curious what it is they are called to and still figuring that out, or in a life transition and so need to adjust to new ways of blessing this world,
- Or maybe Has an idea of what they have been given, but because of this pandemic, are clueless what to do now?
- Maybe we are afraid to use it because of controversy
- Maybe in my case as a pastor I am too afraid to say anything because I am afraid that people will leave the church.
- When we - like the third slave - are called to something... yet don't, due to a plethora of reasons... we worry and wonder what God will think?

- This parable is more than just a parable about what God has gifted you with - it's about what you are going to do in those moments when you have the opportunity to represent Christ and you...well.... Don't.
 - Matt Skinner goes to say in his commentary:
 - Over and over, Jesus emphasizes that faithful Christian discipleship expresses itself through active and ready engagement.
 - In other words, that influence we disciples possess is vital because our lives are situated in a critical place and time.
 - It's a place and time especially important for the well-being of the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, and those who long to experience the refreshment of a full dose of righteousness.
 - The parable works only when we accept its main premise that the stakes are sky-high and our involvement is essential.
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- This story reminds me of when Martin Luther let the Catholic Church know exactly how he felt the church should be.
 - At one point during the Reformation, Luther was in hiding and his counterpart was not sure of what to do, so he sought help and advice from his leader.
 - Luther sent a letter urging him to "sin boldly..."
 - That doesn't mean that he - or us - should go and do something stupid or careless because we are cared for and protected by God.
 - No - we should sin boldly while trusting even more greatly in Jesus Christ.
 - It wasn't about going out and committing a sin, but going out and doing something.
 - We should not be afraid, taking on the persona of the third slave.
 - Instead, we should step out and take a stand, do/say something bold *because* we have trust and faith in God.
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- It seems that these days... with all that is going on,
 - That our call to DO something.... Is actually to DO NOTHING...

- And by that I mean, stay home, limit ourselves socially, wear a mask, wash your hands, and oh yea... stay home...
- For the safety of others... this pandemic calls us to go against all we are called to be as social human beings.
- And this makes us feel like we are denying our calling...
- directly ignoring... feeling complacent or lazy.
- Are We as a church burying our talent by keeping church online and encouraging others to remain at home?
- I know some days totally feel that way.
- But then I look at the ways in which we are stepping up, we are reaching out, we are connecting,
- And yes it feels new and different,
- But I hope you join me in feeling filled with hope that we are doing what we are called to do.
- Does it mean I am satisfied.... No of course not.
- Hear me when I say, I am sad, feeling vulnerable, lost, and afraid of what consequences will come with our decisions...
- But as you see most of the time, I am remaining positive, hopeful, comforted in knowing that for right now,
- For today, we are doing what is best for the congregation as a whole.
- So, this morning, I will stand here and preach boldly and stand alongside anyone who is feeling lost, sad, frustrated, but also hopeful in our present, and looking forward to our future.
- Learning everyday, what we can do, to be the church in this world.
- All of this is hard work, especially when we are tired, burdened, and lonely.
- Fortunately, none of us labors alone.
- None of us influences others all on our own.
- I am entrusted - by God - to do the work
- And The stakes become a lot higher every day.
- Yet...we are reminded today that God has ENTRUSTED us- not given, but entrusted, us with these talents... and one another.
- People may retire, or grow out of doing activities, sports, or hobbies, but we are never UN-CALLED

- The cross on our foreheads never fade-
- We may just not always be able to see that cross on others, or ourselves, but it's there
- It has been, and always will be.
- God has given us all these wondrous gifts - talents - to use and not to hide away for safekeeping.
- We are meant to stretch and experiment and grow with them.
- Even when the world calls us to reimagine how to use those gifts on a day to day basis.
- Amen.