

November 19, 2017

Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost

“The Goodness of Our Master”

Matthew 25:14-30

We’re approaching the end of the church year and thus the eschaton, the Last Day, Judgment Day, is coming onto the radar in our lectionary readings. These readings prompt us to consider the day of judgment and we really should, because the Bible is pretty clear that it’s coming soon—perhaps any day now.

When we hear Jesus’ parable of the talents most of us probably jump to thinking about what we’re doing for God, how well we’re managing our blessings to His glory. That’s good, but I think that might be jumping the gun just a bit. I think first we should examine ourselves, considering what our attitude is toward Judgment Day; toward the returning of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory.

The world and culture most certainly doesn’t have a great view of the Last Day. The end of the world is considered the worst thing that can possibly happen! What is the hero in a lot of books, movies and TV shows always trying to avert? The end of the world! Sure, some great evil or tragedy happens and a bunch of folks say, “Come Lord Jesus,” but they don’t really mean it. Folks love their lives in this world and they don’t want them to end. Lots of people, even Christian people, fear the world ending and really don’t like thinking about it.

I can understand non-Christians feeling this way. They don’t know Jesus. But I think the parable points out how Christians mess this up.

*“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.”*

Why the difference in actions? I think we find out later, when the master comes back. The first two servants come forward, eager to address the master. But the third guy is different. *“Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.”*

This last guy knows his master, but he’s terrified of him! It seems as if he was absolutely dreading the day the master returned. Frozen by fear, the servant didn’t do a thing with the talent with which the master entrusted him. He did nothing, and in doing so condemned himself!

The parable says the other two servants eagerly set about managing what the master gave them to the benefit of the master. Why? I’d presume that they weren’t frozen by fear, but instead motivated by love and devotion. They didn’t fear the master’s wrath. They were eager to receive the master’s blessing!

And this is why I think we’re jumping the gun when we hear this parable if we jump right to analyzing the quality of our managing our blessings to God’s glory. If we do that, what are we going to find? That we stink at it. I don’t think there is a Christian man or Christian woman on earth who can honestly examine themselves and say, “Yeah, I’ve done a great job for God.” Even Mother Teresa in writings discovered after her death lamented how poorly she’d served Him. If you take this parable and look at yourself, you’re setting yourself up to be that last servant, petrified of the return of your Lord.

No, the place to start and the place to focus is the Master Himself. We know who Jesus is by what He has done. He humbled Himself from glory in eternity to suffering and death in our humanity. He didn't do this out of wrath and judgment. He did this out of love...for us...for you!

What is the will of this Master? St. Paul writes quite clearly that God our Savior "*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" Jesus is coming back eager to bestow the fulfillment and completion of the forgiveness, life and salvation He is giving us this very day in His Word and Sacrament! Jesus is a God of blessing to His children!

Trusting this truth, we can be the eager servants joyfully seeking to serve our Master. We do it not out of fear of punishment, but out of joy and thankfulness that we dwell in the Master's house, privileged to serve Him and His Gospel plan of salvation!

Knowing that it is our Master's will to love, forgive and save us, then we can properly examine our lives and assess how we are using our earthly blessings and talents to serve His glory. True, we've failed to serve Him perfectly. We are to share His Word of Gospel love through our words and actions. We are to seek to share His Word of forgiveness with those who don't know Him and exhort and admonish those who know Him but may be struggling in the faith, and we haven't done the greatest job of this. This doesn't condemn us!

The opportunity to serve the Master is still right in front of us today, tomorrow and every day we live and breathe before He calls or comes to gather us to Himself in eternity. We still today obey the Gospel call, to repent and believe the good news! Forgiven our failures in Christ, we put our failures and fears behind us and strive into another day, seeking to put His love on our lips and into our actions.

We don't despair, because despite our faltering efforts, God's promise through the prophet is that His Word will have its way. "*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*"

How good is our Master who seeks to save us, that He even promises our efforts to serve His will always succeed as He wills? Do you see that there is absolutely no need to be afraid, not of Him, and not of our effort to bear fruit for Him? It's all good for those who love their Master and seek His will! His will is that you and all people be saved by His grace!

Not that there isn't warning in this parable. There most certainly is. But the warning isn't about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His most ardent desire is for our good and welfare. He saves us in Baptism. He saves us in His Supper. He saves us in the Gospel proclamation of His Word of forgiveness. The warning is not about Him.

The warning is about us; our tendency to get lazy in our faith, our sinful inclination to push the reality of our Master and the coming day of judgment from our minds so we can sinfully frolic in creation as if without consequence. The warning is not to bury your talent in the sand, and your head along with it.

Realize that you are blessed; blessed to be a beloved servant of the Most High God who bled and died to save you. You've been given the treasure of salvation! Don't hide it. Love it, and love the Master who gave it to you. Joyfully serve Him, because He is the most gracious, giving and loving Master possible. He is all good to you despite yourself. Seek to be His good servant in return.

Amen.