

“Hidden Gifts”
Matthew 25:14-30
Sermon #78
24th Sunday After Pentecost
36th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
11.15.20

Matthew 25:14-30 CEB

14 “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was leaving on a trip.

He called his servants and handed his possessions over to them.

15 To one he gave five valuable coins, and to another he gave two, and to another he gave one. He gave to each servant according to that servant’s ability. Then he left on his journey.

16 “After the man left, the servant who had five valuable coins took them and went to work doing business with them. He gained five more. **17** In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. **18** But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money.

19 “Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. **20** The one who had received five valuable coins came forward with five additional coins. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained five more.’

21 “His master replied, ‘Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’

22 “The second servant also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained two more.’

23 “His master replied, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’

24 “Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven’t sown. You gather crops where you haven’t spread seed. **25** So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what’s yours.’

26 “His master replied, ‘You evil and lazy servant! You knew that I harvest grain where I haven’t sown and that I gather crops where I haven’t spread seed? **27** In that case, you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. **28** Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins. **29**

Those who have much will receive more, and they will have more than they need. But as for those who don’t have much, even the little bit they have will be taken away from them. **30** Now take the worthless servant and throw him out into the farthest darkness.’

“People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This is one of those passages I like to point out to those who say the Old Testament is harsher than the New Testament. It's hard enough to try to explain Jesus' parables, but then you have today's verses that end on weeping and the grinding of teeth. It's bizarre. And I realize we haven't been in Matthew for a long time, but this scripture comes toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. This

parable, along with others starting in Matthew 24:1, is a long discourse of Christ's coming. It's apocalyptic and supposed to unsettle us. These parables that also occur right before Jesus' execution discuss the end of time, including judgement.

Now, to narrow the scope a bit, Matthew 25:14-30 is the third of the judgment parables starting in 24:45. This parable focuses "on the obligations of those who have been granted special gifts" instead of church leaders or Christians in general.¹ And while today's scripture deals with money, it also implies the gifts given to us by God. If the money the servants were given was considered to be many years of income, think about how much more valuable our gifts from God are.

¹ Douglas A. Hare, p. 286

Servants one and two worked with what they were given. Their work paid off and their gifts grew. Unfortunately, the third servant hid what he had been given. And now, this servant has to deal with the consequences of shirking his responsibilities.

Each of these servants had a job. They were given specific amounts of money, each according to their ability, and the one with the least amount failed. And to top off the servant's failure, he blames the master.

Master, I knew that you are a hard man.

You harvest grain where you haven't sown.

You gather crops where you haven't spread seed.

So I was afraid.

This servant didn't even invest the money in the bank where the master could have gained some interest. That was the bare minimum he could've done. But, he took the money and hid it in the ground. He did nothing with it and he was cast into the darkness.

Now, I need to be clear on this. The passage is not about works righteousness. In no one, other than Jesus Christ, do we have eternal security. It is in Matthew's interpretation of this parable compared to Luke's we can read into this Christian service. And that would make sense as Matthew is the only Gospel in which the word "Church" is used.

The third servant is described by the master as “evil and lazy”. Unfortunately, we don’t know why he is as the parable doesn’t give us other details. But, the good thing about Biblical scholars is that they give us their insight on passages, including this one. Douglas A. Hare expounds on this parable and I think in our context in 2020 it can resonate.²

An explanation Hare gives us is that the servant has no love for his master, which can be explained by blaming the master for his shrewdness in verses 24-25. Add to that, this servant is interested only in himself and the security that he and only he can provide to save his own skin instead of taking a risk like the other servants did with their money. This last servant was not interested in service, but in power. And when he is caught, instead of respecting the

² Ibid., 287ff

master, the servant reluctantly acknowledges the power the master has.

The servants were given money according to their abilities. One coin alone the last servant had was a lot of money. Multiply that by two or five and it's even more! They were entrusted by the master to take care of and do something with the money. Two did their job, one did not. For Matthew's interpretation on this parable, this money represents the gifts God has given Christians for particular times. The first two servants, in faith, did what they were supposed to do. The last servant, as Douglas Hare says, "reminds us that love for [Jesus Christ] must be demonstrated in faithful and untiring service to other people."³

³ Ibid., 288

We've been given so much. God has been faithful in every time and place. And even in these cruddy times we are facing in 2020 as a global human family, God has given us resources to face the day and continue on to face tomorrow. Regardless of the types of gifts, regardless of how much we think we have or don't have, God beckons us to be used in service to others for God's glory.

In 2020, it's easy to tighten the grip. And I am so thankful that this congregation has responded out of a spirit of abundance to rise to the challenges we never thought would happen when this year started. Pollocksville could have easily said no, run away, and cowed into the heretical spirit of fear once March was in full swing. Instead, the Spirit with all of the overwhelming peace that only comes from our LORD guided your response. Let it be known,

there are many congregations, big and small, that could learn three or four things from you.

In the chaos, in the uncertainty, and in the temptation to yield to fear, I encourage you to continue to use the gifts God has given you. Some in this room may also be seeing gifts you never knew were there. Explore them. If you need to sift through them, I'm here to help. Don't shy away from your gifts.

For such a time as this, the gifts and resources God has given to us should shine, not be hidden.

Beloved in Christ, believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.