

13 November 2011
Pentecost 22

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Knowing Your Master”

Text: Matthew 25:14-30; Zephaniah 1:7-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are two very different kinds of people in the parable Jesus told us today - the Parable of the Talents.

There are the first two servants. They rejoice in the gifts given them by their Master and the opportunity given to them. They joyfully use their gifts and happily meet the master when he returns. They don't seem concerned with whether their master expected a greater return on his investment or not - they are pleased to come to him, and seem to know that he will be pleased with them. They are faithful servants.

But the third one is different. From the moment he receives the gift, he dreads the master's return. He sees the gift not as an opportunity but as a burden. So when the master returns, this servant is not happy, but uncertain. He is consumed with doubt, for he seems not to know his master at all, thinking him not kind and generous, but hard and unjust. He is not a faithful, but a fearful, servant.

So which of the two are you? How is it with you in your life?

That's an important question, for as we see with these servants, how it is with your life is a reflection of how it is with your faith. Whether we are faithful or fearful servants will be reflected in what we do with the gifts and talents God has given to us. And whether we are faithful or fearful will come from what we believe about our Father in heaven. Is He a kind, gracious, and giving God, who gives to us for us to use and enjoy, and so that we can have the joy of giving back to Him from what He has given to us? Or is He a hard, harsh, and demanding God, who gives to us to obligate us and demand from us? What you believe of God makes the difference between living with confidence and joy, or living in dread, with your head (and your talent) *buried in the sand*.

And so Jesus tells this parable not so much to teach us what to do. No, Jesus tells this parable for the same reason He tells all His parables - to teach us about God; who *He* is and what *He* is doing. To teach us about our *giving* Father in heaven, so

that in this time before Jesus returns, we may be children of our Father, giving and living as He has done for us.

Which means that the key for all of you to be faithful and not fearful servants is not for me to stand up here and tell you to be faithful and joyful; to be like those first two servants and produce! No. The key is to know your Master, your Father in heaven. Faith and joy come only when fear is taken away; when you know your Father in heaven; when you know that He is good and kind and gracious. Then you are free to live the same, as good and faithful servants.

So let us consider our Father in heaven. First, we confess in the catechism that:

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife, and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me all that I need to support this body and life.

A giving God. All that you have is from your Father in heaven. If He didn't give it, you wouldn't have it. All is gift for you to use and enjoy. To some He gives more and to some less, yes, as in the parable. But this, too, is good. He gives what He does because He knows you. Love does not treat everyone the same, but each person uniquely and individually. He gives you what you need, but not more than you can handle. And never because you deserve it - *all this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.* All gift.

Now, such trusting is risky. It is much safer and shrewder to trust no one. Then you won't be disappointed when you are let down or betrayed. That is, in fact, what happened to God when (in the beginning) His children Adam and Eve betrayed His trust and traded all that He had given for sin; when they believed satan's lying words, that their Master ***is a hard God, reaping where He did not sow and gathering where He did not scatter.*** And the result was fear, not faith. . . . And so it is often with us who listen to satan's lying words and so turn from faith to fear. When we listen to the lie that God has given others more and so loves us less. When we listen to the lie that God is not good, but hard and demanding and unjust. When we listen to those lies, we shrink from faith, live in fear, betray His trust, and bury our heads, hearts, hands, and lives in the sands of sin and death.

But that is when we find out even *more* about our giving God, for He *has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His*

own . . . In response to our sin and its devastating effects, our Father does not turn away from us, but has more giving up His sleeve!

Because of our sin, the Day of the Lord and His return changed from a day of joy and gladness, to a day of doom and sadness. Adam and Eve hid from God, in fear. That day was a day like the prophet Zephaniah described: **A day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.** A day like that third, fearful servant was expecting.

But instead of that day coming upon us, the Father poured that day out upon His Son on the cross. All the wrath, all the distress, all the ruin and devastation, all the darkness and gloom, all the anguish and **weeping and gnashing of teeth** that is by right ours, and for eternity, Jesus took upon Himself instead. In your place. He drank that cup of suffering and condemnation to its dregs, that your sins be forgiven; that your sin and betrayal not be held against you; that not you but your fear be banished; that the fortress of satan be crushed, and you be set free to the life of faith again. That you see in Jesus' resurrection not the life of one, but the life of all, for He died for all. And that you know God *there* as He truly is - our God who, as St. Paul told us today, ***"has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him."***

And we do now live with Him, for *the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. . . . He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. One the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.*

And so after creating us and redeeming us, our Lord gives still more to us! Giving us His Spirit, and with His Spirit the gift of faith, the forgiveness of sins, and the life of His resurrection in Holy Baptism. And as His children, in His Church, we are again free to live, free to use all those talents our Lord has given us, in the places He has placed us. To care and give and love and serve - giving as we have been so graciously given to.

Because knowing our Father through the revelation of His Son and the faith and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we know that we cannot possibly out care, out give, out love, or out serve the One who gives us all things. And so we are free to use His gifts, in confidence and joy. And living in such faith and joy now, we will be like those first two servants - joyful when our Lord returns, knowing that He will be pleased with us.

Without that assurance, without that faith, there is only fear. But that is not what our Lord wants! For *anyone*. That is not why He created this world, that is not why He gives us His gifts, that is not why He sent His Son, that is not why He continues to give to us still today! He gives so that we may live - now, as we wait for Jesus to return; and forever, in His rest, when He does.

Now, we are waiting. Now we are in the in-between time of the Parable. Now we have the privilege and opportunity to use these gifts, to be like our Father, and brothers and sisters of our Saviour, using and giving the gifts we have been given - whether they be many or few, much or little - in confidence and joy, being like Him who has given to us.

And then when Jesus returns, we will meet Him with the faith that we lived, and ***enter into the joy*** that we have already begun to receive here. The joy we enter into as our Saviour comes even now to us in the Lord's Supper. As Jesus comes to us in His body and blood, with the gifts of forgiveness and faith that we need. That we who *now* joyfully proclaim His death until He comes, will *then* joyfully enter into His life and kingdom when He does.

Until then, as St. Paul said to us today, ***“let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”*** The devil will not cease his attacks and his lies. But know the truth. Know His Word. Know your giving and loving God. And when He does return, hear those wonderful words that will be spoken to you as well: ***“Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your master.”***

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.