

Matthew 25:14-30 - “Faith & Works”

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Last week we heard Jesus’ end time parable about ten virgins, five foolish and five wise. The foolish virgins ended up in hell because they were not ready when the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, arrived. We can conclude from Scripture that the reason the foolish virgins were not ready was because they had not taken advantage of the gifts God provides for us through His Word and Sacraments to make and keep us ready. On the other hand, the wise virgins, who had taken advantage of the gifts God provides for us through His Word and Sacraments, like we’re doing this morning, they were made and kept ready to enter into heaven when the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, arrived.

In Jesus’ follow-up parable about the talents, our Gospel reading for today, the Lord backs up a bit from His return on the Last Day to talk about what we who have been made ready are doing while we’re waiting for His return. He speaks about the fruit or lack of fruit God produces through us as His faithful or unfaithful people. The “*master*” in this parable would be God, who is known most clearly through Jesus Christ. Where do we fit in to this parable? Since in this life we as Christians are simul justus et peccator (simultaneously saints and sinners), sometimes we act like the first two faithful servants, and sometimes we act like the third unfaithful servant.

The “*talent*” in Jesus’ parable is an amount of money equivalent at that time to about 20 years wages. That’s the earthly picture. But according to its heavenly meaning, a “*talent*” points to all that God gives us, especially His gift of eternal life which He gives us through our faith that God loves us sinners so much that He was willing to take on our flesh so that He could suffer the judgement spoken of in our OT reading, the “*distress, anguish, ruin, devastation, darkness and gloom,*” because of our sins. But then He rose from the dead to show us that He is God and infinitely more powerful than our sins, death and the devil. Through this “*talent,*” this priceless gift of our eternal life as children of God, God continues to generate and daily regenerate new and eternal life in us, and it will do the same for others if we don’t bury it but share it.

St. Paul said in our Epistle reading that we are “*children of light,*” through whom God gives light and life to the world around us. God’s doing that right now through our presence here today, leading others to the *Light of the World*” (John 8:12), Jesus Christ, who is with us today through His Word and Sacraments. This means that we are like the first two servants in Jesus’ parable, not the third servant who buried his “*talent.*” But sadly through the week there are times when we do bury Christ’s light, His free gift of eternal life for all.

There are many ways we can bury the “*talent*” God has given us—our new and eternal life in Jesus Christ. One way is through “*complacency*” which was spoken of in our OT reading; settling in to life in this world in such a way that we forget that we are God’s people passing through this world with God’s eternal life generating message of salvation to give to those who are dead in their trespasses and sins—a message which can raise them up from death to life.

Another way we tend to bury the “*talent*” God has given us—our new and eternal life in Jesus Christ—is when we act as if we are defeated by the things going on in our lives, whether it’s due to troubles with our health, our finances,

or our family (including our church family). When we allow any of these things to bring us down, to make us worry, or to hide our light as eternal children of God, we are guilty of a form of idolatry. We're putting our fear, love or trust in the things of this world above God and His promises. I certainly fell prey to this way of burying the light of Christ during this past week.

Our fight against our sinful nature, which seeks to bury our new life in Christ through endless forms of idolatry, is an ongoing fight in this life which appears as if we'll never win. That's when we need to over and over again be reminded of the Good News that Jesus is our almighty and everlasting Savior. In one of the devotions I read this past week, I was reminded that when God's people in Moses' day had Pharaoh's blood thirsty and heavily armed soldiers behind them and the deep waters of the Red Sea ahead of them, it appeared that they were defeated. What could they do? Nothing!

But that's just where God wanted them, out of all human options to save themselves. For it's at such times that God, through His Word tells us, as He told the people then through Moses, *"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today"* (Exodus 14:13). Then God parted the Red Sea, letting the Israelites pass through the midst of the sea on dry ground, and later drowning the Egyptian army who came into the midst of the sea after them. *"Not one remained"* (v. 28).

Through that amazing deliverance Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that God enabled His people at that time to "die." Die to their doubts, worries and fears. Die to their thinking that it all depends on us and what we can do. Instead, God enables us through His acts of deliverance, at the Red Sea, at the cross, and at the waters of our Baptism, to believe. Believe that God is with us to deliver us.

I was also reminded this past week, in another devotion, of Ephesians 4:10, *"He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things."* Meditate on this good news that our almighty God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who loves us so much that He was willing to die for us, and then rise in victory over our sins, death and the devil, fills all things in this world, good and bad, and is working through it all for our good. We need only sit and wait to see the amazing things God does.

But does our faith in these works of God cause us to sit and do nothing while we wait for God's final deliverance on the last day? No. Instead they enable us, like the first two servants in Jesus' parable to invest His good news of deliverance in Jesus Christ with others. When we do, the fruits of our faith are beyond our knowing in this life. We'll hear more about that next Sunday.

All glory be to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[Children's Sermon] What does God give us? Everything we have, most importantly our faith in His Son who became a man in Jesus Christ so that He could die on a cross to get rid of our sins, and rise from the dead to give us His eternal life. In our Gospel reading one of the things God tells us is what happens when we share our faith and life as children of God with others.

Jesus does this by comparing all the things He gives us, including our faith and life as children of God to a gold coin, which at that time was called a "talent." What does He say will happen if, after giving you a gold coin like this one, you share it with someone else who doesn't have a gold coin. God will give you another one in its place.

The same is true with our faith and life as children of God, we can share with others the things that God gives us in the sure and certain faith that God will continue to give us all we need for life in this world, and even more so when He takes us to heaven.