

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV

Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: November 19, 2023, Year A, 25th Sunday after Pentecost, Stewardship 2 of 2

Text: Matthew 25:14-30 The Parable of the Talents

Title: Powered by Joy and Gratitude

Focus: The third servant in the parable is immobilized by fear and buries his gift. The good news is that we are invited to share our gifts with joy. The sermon will provide examples of giving with joy and gratitude at Good Shepherd.

Gospel Reading Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The Parable of the Talents

- **Why do you think each of these three servants in the parable did what they did?**

Jesus told a parable: A householder entrusted three servants with portions of his property.

- He gave to each according to their ability, with the first receiving 5 talents, the second 2, and the third 1 talent.
- How much do you think those were worth?
- A “talent” was a unit of measure, with a weight of somewhere around 80 pounds.
 - The *value* of that weight depended upon whether you were using gold, silver, or some other precious item.
 - When used as a unit of money, a talent was valued for that weight of silver. As a unit of currency, a talent was worth about 6,000 denarii. A denarius was the usual payment for a day's labor.
 - At one denarius per day, a single talent was therefore worth 20 years of labor (assuming a 6-day work week, because nobody would work on the weekly Sabbath).¹
 - So, even the third servant received an amount equal to 20 years' worth of work. (Oh, my goodness!)
- And then the man went away.
- When he came back, he asked each of them to report on what they had done.
- The first two acknowledge the gift they received and then report that they have doubled the gift—from 5 to 10 and from 2 to 4.
- The third servant has a long explanation:
 - “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.”

Wow! The first thing that strikes me is how he describes the householder:

- **“I knew that you were a harsh man. . .”**
 - The one who gave you 20 years of wages, without any rigid instructions on what to do or how to do it, but entrusted you with this generosity, you view him as *harsh*?!
 - He was generous and trusting, and you call him harsh?!

Back to the opening question: **Why do you think each of these three servants in the parable did what they did?**

In the telling of the story, there is not much to go on to determine the internal motivation of the first two servants.

¹ Arland J. Hultgren, [*The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*](#), Eerdmans Publishing, 2002, [ISBN 0-8028-6077-X](#), pp. 271–281. As excerpted in Wikipedia entry on “Parable of the Talents.”

- The text says that the first servant went “at once,” so it sounds like there was some urgency or that he was motivated. He went and traded with what he was given and he doubled it.
- The description of the second servant is likewise brief and matter-of-fact: “In the same way,” the text says, the second servant “made two more talents.”

When the householder comes back, he commends them both and invites them to “enter into the joy of your master” (vv. 21, 23).

The description of the actions of the third servant are also matter-of-fact without attribution of motivation at that time:

- He “went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money” (v. 18).

When the master came back “after a long time,” they all reported what they had done. This is when the third servant explains:

- Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ (v. 24b-25).

Contrast in the Reasons for One’s Actions

- **Why do you think each of these three servants in the parable did what they did?**

A parable is designed to get you thinking. To wonder,

- “Why did they do that?”
- “Do I do that?”
- “What did Jesus mean when he said. . .”

As I have said before with parables, there is not one and only one “point” to get or just one theme or meaning that could be drawn, but they’re made for you to puzzle over and ponder.

The thing that sticks out to me reading and hearing this one this time is **the difference between the experience of joy to which each of the first two were invited and the fear that immobilized the third servant.**

The text doesn’t say if the first two expected anything in particular; they just wisely used or invested what had been entrusted to them.

The text says the master “entrusted his property to them” (v. 14). He gave them no specific instructions and promised no particular reward. Just as the master “entrusted his property” to them, it sounds also like *they trusted him*.

The third was so afraid that he dug a hole.

He was so immobilized by fear that he wasn't even thinking straight. He dug a hole, which of course requires some personal effort, but creates no benefit whatsoever. But, as the master points out later when the report is given, had he gone to the bankers, which doesn't require that same personal effort, he would have at least earned some interest (v. 27).

What Motivates Our Actions?

If the question of the day is **“Why do you think each of these three servants in the parable did what they did?”** and parables are intended to get us thinking about ourselves and how God is at work in the world, then the next question to ponder could be . . .

- What motivates our actions?
- If we're observing the contrast between trust and some appreciation for joy exhibited by the first two and the fear which immobilizes the third servant, then what drives us?
- **I'd like to say that joy and gratitude rather than fear are what drive us.** Is that the case? Or, in what ways do we do that well and in what ways not so well?

Celebrating “Quilt Day” at Good Shepherd

The Quilt Story (to share in a sermon)

- We blessed 137 quilts on Quilt Sunday, October 1 this year.
- Many people have said, “That's my favorite Sunday of the whole year.”
- Show pictures of LCGS quilters and quilts
 - The quilts were displayed everywhere that Sunday (October 1):
 - Sanctuary pews, Communion table, ambo, Welcome Space. . .
- Dropping off the quilts story: When Bob and Vicki arrived at St. James Lutheran Church in Redding and began to unload, the pastor of the church who was helping them asked, “From how many churches are all these quilts?” He had the assumption that so many quilts must have come from many churches. “No, just one!”
- Quilters themselves love this—love creating, love being together as a group, love knowing that this will make a difference to a person—especially because the quilts are often given to those who have experienced a disaster.
 - That's love and joy and gratitude that they all experience.
- **Quilt “Woo Blessing”** When the quilters work together, they usually have 3 large workstations set up, each with a quilt on it. They have one or two people at sewing machines. When they finish a particular quilt, the quilters from that table invite all the others over. They place their hands on the quilt and they offer this

prayer: “May this quilt bless your body and warm your soul. Amen. WOO! WOO! WOO!”

- Each time the whole group shouts out “Woo,” they quickly lift up the quilt from the table.

These 137 quilts will join other quilts which are taken to St. James in Redding. Then they’ll all be taken to a distribution center from which they will be sent out. People who experience a disaster like a hurricane, flood, or fire will receive quilts. People who flee from their homes to seek safety from political turmoil, economic hardship, or threat of violence will receive quilts. And they can know that people whom they have never met have prayed for them and wish them to have this sign of their love and the love of God.

This is a Quilt Story and Not a Quilt Story

This story is about quilting, but it’s not about quilting. It’s about the broader ministry of Good Shepherd Church and the joy that we get when we give of ourselves. Here’s how another person has experienced the same thing with a different ministry within Good Shepherd.

“Why Do I Bring Food for the Eddy House?”

Here is one person’s reply to “Why do I give?”

He first talked about a childhood experience of seeing a person in need and having that indelibly imprinted on him—that to see a person in such need was not right and created in him the intent to respond with generosity. “Why do I give to the Eddy House?” Here’s how he replied:

How we are so absorbed and selfish that we waste what God has given us instead of sharing it equally for all. I give to Eddy House because I want those kids to not feel any different than [my son] did [growing up]. [They should feel] sheltered and fed and loved. To not feel alone. If all of us just gave a little. If we all could just set aside our overwhelming extras and spares, gosh we could make such a difference. We could make so much hunger and suffering go away.

I hear echoes of the parable in what he has written about what this means to him. Property has been entrusted to him—entrusted to all of us.

Closing

The cool thing is that this is not an isolated story at Good Shepherd. It’s not just one story about the Hearts and Hands Quilters, but God is active in and among us in all kinds of ways. And the joy that comes from being a part of those things. We get invited

to participate in events like that. It's like we are the people in the parable who are entrusted with property and get an opportunity to experience joy and gratitude.

- Check out the mailing which came Friday or Saturday to you, which has a description of our financial picture for 2024 and the ways that you can .
- We invite you to prepare Estimate of Giving for next week. It's a reflection on your family circumstance, recognizing that we have a variety of gifts and a variety of responsibilities and then saying, "Here's how I want to share in the good things that are going on at Good Shepherd."

Thanks be to God for what has been entrusted to us. May we respond with trust, gratitude, and joy.