Twenty Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
15 November 2026

Matthew 25:14-30

I am often fascinated by the amount of foods that grow side by side look-alikes, but that are drastically different. When you see blackberries, salmon berries, and brambles you believe that all three are edible and proper for cooking. Experts know, however, that Brambles bear no edible fruit at all, Salmon berries produce salmon-colored fruits that are almost completely tasteless. And Blackberries produce plump, dark fruit that are incredibly useful and have a delicious taste.

Another example comes from the world of mushrooms. At first glance many wild mushrooms look just like the types of mushrooms you and I buy at the store. But even though they look alike, not all mushrooms are equal. Some have no edible value, some have value and are safe to eat, some are extremely rare and very expensive, and some are outright poisonous and could kill you.

Today we have a parable of three people given the potential to grow yet delivering three different results. This is the third parable of Matthew's last original speech. Before this parable, we saw the servant in charge of other servants at the end of chapter 24, and the ten bridesmaids at the beginning of chapter 25, which we studied last week. Today's parable is not about salvation, per se, but about what each of us is called by God to do while we wait for the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Parables about salvation make a point to tell us that we are all invited to the banquet, that we are all given salvation equally, that we are all called children of God, etc. This parable, however, makes a point of saying that Talents are given to us according to our ability. We are all saved equally, but we are given talents, not equally, but according to our abilities.

Let us get into the parable. As a man was about to go on a journey, he trusts three of his servants with the task of managing his property. He gives one 5 Talents, another 2, and another 1. The word Talent here means a large amount of money, which gives us a clue of the Master's generosity. In fact, one talent would be the equivalent to between 75 to 96 pounds of silver, depending on the system of measurement you use. Now, at the average daily wage of one denarius per day, a person would work 20 years to save 1 Talent. So, in fact, he gives one of the servants the equivalent to 100 years' worth of wages, another the equivalent to 40 years, and the last the equivalent to 20 years. These are incredibly large sums.

Right from the start we see the master's generosity. He lavishly provides for his servants and then he goes on his way without given specific instructions as to how the Talents were to be invested. The servants were to be responsible for the incredible sums entrusted to them, but they would have to use their industry, initiative, and risk-taking to produce results. There would have been a clear expectation that the slave, generously treated as a business manager, can use a percentage of earnings for the care of his family and his community.

We are told that the first two invested their Talents, creating a return for the Master and providing richly for their families and communities. The third buried the money in the ground, failing to provide for those he loved. There are two other signs of the Master's generosity: First, the parable does not tell us how much the Master required in return, leaving the possibility open that even a small return on investment would be acceptable to him. Second, he stayed away a long time, giving them plenty of time to generate returns.

Eventually, perhaps when they least expected him, the Master returned to settle accounts. This follows the pattern we have seen in the first two parables of this unit. The one who was given five Talents is praised and given five more at first, and then an additional one. The one who produced two, likewise was praised and given two more Talents. The one who was given one talent, however, was severely criticized and punished for burying the money, but the Master tells him that even a small interest from the bankers would have been sufficient.

I would like to analyze this brief interaction between the master and this third servant: It was a well-known practice in Palestine to bury money in the ground to protect it from thieves, to prevent loss of value in unstable economies, or simply to save it for a future crisis. There were few banks and many people simply did not trust the bankers. So, this servant did the minimum expected of him, he protected his master's money. What may be subject to criticism here is the reasons for his behavior, more than the behavior itself.

The servant tells the master, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." The servant acted not out of concern for the master's money, but out of fear. He views the master as a harsh man, as a merciless judge, as an inflexible task master, so he buries the Talent out of fear. By doing so, he fails to provide for his family and community as well. He has an inadequate view of the master. He does not think of the master's generosity: he was entrusted with a great sum of money,

he was given freedom to invest at will and make a profit for himself and for his master, he was given "a long time" to produce results, etc.

His view of his master has become his reality. Perhaps there is a lesson for us here as well. I believe often God becomes for us what we believe God to be. I do not mean that we create God in our image, but rather that our inadequate beliefs about God affect our perception of God and we become unable to see the whole picture of who God is. If we believe God to be gracious, he is that for us. For those who believe God to be hard, demanding, and judgmental; to them God is that. (www.crossmarks.com/brian/matt25x14.htm).

We are told in the story that the master calls the servant, "wicked, lazy and worthless." We are also told that he was judged and thrown "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The parable makes no qualms about the fact that all of us have been gifted with the talents necessary to produce good fruit. We are all given whatever is necessary for us to become like the Blackberries in the Pacific Northwest. But my friends many of us produce the minimum expected, if we produce anything at all.

I know that among my Evangelical friends there is a fear to fall for a works-righteousness mentality that is not Biblical. Works righteousness is when you come to believe that you earn your own salvation through your good works, which is contrary to the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel tells us that by dying on the cross, Christ paid the price for our sins and acquired salvation for all of us. Salvation is a free gift from God through Christ which we obtain by faith. So, many believe that doing good works means that we are trying to earn our salvation and not accepting Christ's gift. I believe this view is a misunderstanding of the Gospel.

This parable is not about our salvation, but rather about how we are to behave while we wait our Lord's return. Our Lord expects us to produce good fruits. Good fruits are the result of our proper view of God and the result of our faith. A fully engaged Christian is called to have a fruit-full life and not a selfish, self-centered, self-directed life. The choice is ours then. We can either produce no useful fruit, become poisonous to those around us, and be of no use to God. Or we can strive to lead productive lives that bless others and give honor to God.

I pray today that each of us will accept God's talents and invest them in such a way as to produce the fruit of the kingdom of God. I pray that all of us may lead lives filled with "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

May our Lord continue to bless us. Amen!