

Sermon on Pentecost 24 - A
Prepared for delivery at St. John's Lutheran Church
Pearl City, Illinois
11/15/20

From the Good News according to Matthew: "For it is as if a man, going away on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is another one of those cases where the translation comes out differently than we think of things. Slaves and servants often are the same word in Hebrew. And even those who were slaves were treated far differently than we think of.

This is a parable about a man who was going for a trip and couldn't govern his own property from a distance; his internet connection was down. So, what he did was to give over parts of his business and properties to servants who worked for him. These kinds of servants were often seen, and trusted, as members of the family. Now, he had some who were good managers, and some who weren't so good, but he had to give some part of the responsibility to all of them otherwise the ones that didn't get trusted with anything would feel – like they weren't trusted; even though they didn't really want to be trusted with anything anyway (who needs the responsibility?). This was a common practice for doing business at this time in history.

Jesus is using this as an example of what it will be like when He has to leave the earth, and we are to be trusted with seeing to His business. We, all of us, are responsible to see to it that the earthly Church not only is safe, but that it grows! Each of us, every one of us, has been given some talent, some course of action, that can be used to further the Church.

What, do you think, might have happened if one of the servants in this parable went out and invested the master's talents, on a sure thing, can't lose, a good friend gave them investment advice, – and then they lost the masters talents? What might the master have said when it came

time for a reckoning? I think it might have sounded like, “Well done good and faithful servant, at least you tried. I’ll give you some more, – and a blessing to go with it, so that you might try again.” Trying and failing is a part of life, but not trying at all is not what God expects from us.

Many years ago, Billy Graham had been sick, but was on the mend, nonetheless, some reporters came to him and asked him what he thought it would be like whenever he did die and came before judgment. Graham said that he hoped that Jesus would quote this parable and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Then Graham added that he didn’t think that Jesus would say that to him, but he truly hoped for it. Graham was aware that he was a sinner, though I can’t even guess what sins he might have been guilty of, but the book of Romans tells us that we are all sinful and fall short of the glory of God; Graham knew that he was a sinner – and feared God’s judgment. I guess maybe he figured that, “From those to whom more has been given will much more be required.”

I remember thinking, when he said that, that this is a man, as full of God as he was, this was a man who didn’t understand grace, the unearned love of God; he still thought that he had to earn his way into the heavenly kingdom. If I could, if I could, be righteous enough to earn my way into heaven, then I wouldn’t need a Savior; – and then the whole thing would be on my back. Boy am I glad that God is in charge and not me.

Now, this means that we all, all, have a God given talent, an ability that can be used to further the ministry of Jesus on this earth. The fact is that we certainly have much more than just one talent; we all surely have many things that we can do to further the kingdom here on earth. This talent is embedded within each one of us; we often just don’t recognize it. I think, like the scared servant, we don’t want to recognize it. If we do, then we’ll have to do something with it. Most of us can think of something: knit prayer shawls, sew quilts, teach Sunday school, serve on

the church council, maintain the buildings and grounds, and on and on. But there are things that we don't usually think of as being things that can further the Church. Perhaps greatest of these is to be an example of a Christian in our community; witness with our lives.

I once had a professor that told me that I shouldn't look at the things that I can do and pick out the weakest one and work on that one, to build it up. He said that if I did that, what I would have in the end is a lot of things – at which I would be mediocre. He said that I should find one thing that I do well; hone that, polish that, get to doing that one thing so well that I have at least one thing at which I am excellent.

God has given us all talents, to some very few talents, but to all, some. Assess what you can do, find one of the things that you do well, and polish it, hone it, make it a thing renown. Being good at one thing will help you become good at something else. Say you know quite a bit about farming, but maybe you're not too good at public speaking, work at that knowledge base, hone it, polish it, work it up into something that people will want to hear you tell them about. Then speak to the glory of God. You don't have to be giving witness; maybe your speech is about tying knots in a rope so that you can measure how much trash you're leaving in your field (that may be a western thing, I learned it in Colorado). Maybe it's the pros and cons of fall plowing. Maybe it's when and how to spread slurry, and where not to stand when your neighbor is spreading it. But whatever it is that you do well, make it better. Then give that speech to the 4-H, the FFA, the Kiwanis, the Moose, the Lions, or whatever other animal that invites you; all of these clubs are always looking for a presenter. When you speak, even about slurry, they'll know that you're a Christian; it shows through. So, even if you're talking about farming, you're witnessing to the community about Christianity.

If you're certain that you could never speak in public (I truly believe that everyone can if they can muster up the courage to try it), but if you just can't bring yourself to do it, there are lots and lots of other forms of service that will bring glory to God. Even if you think that you're just good at making phone calls; that's something. In fact, that's something that not all of us are good at. I hate making phone calls. I'd rather drive across town to talk to someone in person, than to make a five-minute phone call. Look at the prayer list for the week. Call those people. Give them support, let them know that they're being thought about and prayed for. Polish your phone calling talent and you'll be able to bring joy and comfort to a lot of people.

We all have a talent, or two, or a dozen, look for yours, hone it, polish it, use it to grow the talents of others. Amen.

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