

The 24th Sunday After Pentecost

November 15, 2020

Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 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.’”



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This parable of the 5 talents is all about abundance. It begins with an abundance that the master entrusts to his slaves. The parable also ends in abundance except for the one slave who chooses to live in fear.

The master is about to embark on a journey; but, before he goes, he entrusts his abundance to his three slaves. To one slave he gives 5 talents, to another 2 talents, and to the last 1 talent. Now, this is an abundance that the master gives away, for one talent equals around \$6,000.00. denarii. That means the master gave a total of \$48,000.00 denarii to his slaves. Back in the days of Jesus that was quite an abundant fortune!

Two of the slaves choose to invest their denarii creating more abundance. The first slave doubles his talents to 10, which would equal \$60,000 denarii. The second slave also invests his talents and doubles his gain as well; a total of \$24,000 denarii. The third slave is fearful of the master and is so worried about making a mistake that he chooses to hide his one denarius by digging a hole in the ground and placing it there. The denarius sits there at the bottom of the hole doing nothing to increase in abundance.

Now, this parable isn't about investing money to please God. The denarii, in my opinion, are a metaphor for the abundance of love, grace, and faith that God bestows on us at baptism. Jesus entrusts us with his love, his grace, and faith in him so that we may feel free to share his love and grace, and our faith in him with others. To share the abundance that Jesus gives to us is to "invest" in it, which causes the abundance to grow.

In my previous congregation there was a man named Mark. I met him for the first time at a Habitat for Humanity build day that our congregation had volunteered to participate in. As I got to know Mark, he shared with me that he hadn't been to worship because he was angry at God over the death of his daughter, and he just needed some time away. I told him that I understood, affirming that it was okay to be angry at God. I also assured him that I wasn't taking attendance, and neither was God. At the end of the workday, another member from the congregation named Tom, invited Mark to join our newly formed men's Bible study. Mark said, "we'll see," and left it at that.



Fast-forward to the next men's Bible study and there was Mark; he showed up after all. Soon, Mark was coming to each monthly men's Bible study and began rebuilding relationships with the other guys who participated in the study. Before I knew it, Mark was coming to worship again, and soon after that, Mark began to volunteer in the congregation's ministry through being an usher for worship, but also helping out with youth events.

As I watched Mark grow in his faith and love for God through Bible study, worship, and serving, it gave me great joy to see Mark blossom in his faith. It all started because Mark received the gift of abundant love through me and the other guys of the men's Bible study group. We shared with Mark our love and our faith. In it, Mark found grace, and rediscovered his love for Jesus.

Is there a similar story in your life? Was there a time when you shared your love for Jesus and your faith with someone and it had a profound effect on them? Was there a time when someone shared their love for Jesus and it transformed you?

Sharing our love for Jesus and our faith in the fact that he is the risen Christ is what this parable is all about. Whenever and wherever we are willing to live out our faith and our love for Jesus, it creates more abundance of God's love in the world. And we are free to share the love of Christ with others because we have been given an abundance of God's love through Christ's death and resurrection. God reminds us of this abundance, freely given to us, through the means of grace we experience each week in worship; that is to say, through the daily gift of baptism, the gift of God's word proclaimed, and the gift of the bread of life and cup of salvation.

But there is a word of caution in this parable, and that is the third slave. The issue with the third slave is that he allows fear to control his actions. This slave is so afraid of the master's wrath that he chooses not to invest or share the abundance given to him. The consequence of that is that he lives an unfruitful life, a life void of great joy, a life filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth.



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There are many people in our society who have sworn off the church because some faith community they were previously acquainted with preached a gospel of the wrath of God. The gospel preached was more about divine punishment than it was about God's love. There was little grace to be found.

Because of this, we have an opportunity to reach out to these people and show them that Jesus is not about wrath and divine punishment, but rather that Jesus is all about abundant love and grace. We can help all the "Marks" of the world discover or rediscover their love for God. All it takes is a willingness to share the abundance God has given us; to show others what a joy it is to be in loving relationship with Jesus, but also what a joy it is to share our faith and watch it grow in others.

What is even more good news is that, when we freely share the abundance of love given to us from Jesus, when we invest that abundance into others, we also will experience the amazing gift of entering into the joy of Jesus, a joy which will raise us up so that we will be in the abundance of God's embrace for all eternity.

So, how will you invest the abundance given to you?

Amen.



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