

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

The text is from the Gospel lesson, Matthew the twenty-fifth chapter in particular verse twenty-one.

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

The word "talent" has a meaning here that we are not used to. It is a measure of weight for precious metals, or what we would think of a wealth. So, it would be really easy to read today's gospel lesson and leap the to conclusion that God expects us to produce—to leverage what we have and become "successful"; that success, and by implication, money has an important place in our lives. The problem is this is not consistent with what else we know from scripture. Remember how ***"Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven."***, how He told the rich young man, ***"You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*** And when Moses warned the people, ***"Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth."***

No, this is not about money or honing our skills to get the stuff. It is about being a **good and faithful** servant—taking the things God has given us and living out our vocation as His children. Paul wrote ***“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”***. We are His children imitating our Father. And as in all families, the kids are all different. Some are loud and boisterous, some are quiet and thoughtful. All are loved. We are His servants obeying our Master. And as in every households, all of us have different responsibilities. Some are highly visible and some do the necessary work quietly in the background. All are loved.

Some will be called to more visible things than others, Martin Luther for example. He had a difficult and certainly an important task in stirring things up and restoring the church. Was what he did more valuable in the eyes of God than raking leaves on church cleanup day? Was it as difficult as loving your neighbor? What does the parable say each of us living and working in our place? There are three levels of involvement in the parable—the master gave different amounts, five talents, two talents, and one talent, to his servants; but there were only two outcomes—one positive, one negative. That is because there were two responses to the gift of God.

I think it's easiest to understand the good outcome by looking at the other side first—at the servant who was given one talent. He took the money and, to use a modern idiom, hid it in his mattress. Why? The current term I think is “trust issues”. What did he think of himself. What did he think of his Master?

We live in a world where most people think that god is optional—that we humans are just a part of nature, just the result of another series of evolutionary accidents. So what we do, what we are, really doesn't matter that much.

That's not true. We are created in God's image to be His children. We are the work of His hand and the object of His affection. People understood that better two thousand years ago; everybody believed that there was a god or maybe more than one god, but they thought of god as pulling the strings of everyday life and you had better behave or else. The unfaithful servant in this parable was thinking that way; it was burned into his conscience. He was terrified. Perhaps he had looked inside enough to that he understood what his own heart was like—just how dark it was. Perhaps he thought his master's heart was like that too, empty and maybe a little vengeful.

Luther understood the experience of a terrified conscience. As he studied God's Word, he began to understand the depth of his sin and how utterly consistent he was when it came to God's Law—always failing. Luther knew his own efforts weren't enough—never would be enough. But as he continued to discover God's Word, he saw something else. God's Law is more than a harsh set of rules, it is the path to life, but God's Law is fulfilled not in what we do on our own, but by God Himself in what Christ Jesus did for us. There is no salvation without satisfying the demands of the Law.

That's done now. It was accomplished on the Cross.

But the unfaithful servant turned his back on what Jesus does to save us. He saw God as ***"a hard man"*** and while it is true that our God is a just God who punishes the wicked, it is also true that He is a God of mercy. He has declared ***"let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."*** and ***"I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants."*** The unfaithful servant didn't see that the thing God offered him was offered in mercy, was poured out in tenderness.

But then we should understand the unfaithful servant pretty well. We were like that once.

The ***faithful servants*** in the parable were once just like the ***unfaithful servant***—dry ground waiting for something, not even knowing what it was. No, we didn't know who holds our salvation. We didn't know our salvation had been in relentless motion since God confronted Adam and Eve in the Garden. We didn't know the cost of that salvation either, and thankfully we will never know it completely for ***“as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”*** The faithful servants have been invited to ***enter into the joy of your master*** where we rest in Him.

Our Master gives us faith, His grace pours out on us like ***streams on dry ground*** in the gift of faith. ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith.”*** Even our faithfulness springs from our Father's hand, from the work of Jesus in His life, death, and resurrection, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. ***“And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”*** The gift of God, the property entrusted to us, is faith.

Faith, fed by the Word, strengthened in the Sacraments, grows. The second letter to the church at Thessaloníka begins, ***“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.”***

Faith grows, or faith dies.

It grows, not just by taking in God's word, but also in acting in that Word—living out the Law. For the expression of faith is to walk in the Law not as slaves, but loving God and loving each other, having the clean heart our Father puts in us to worship Him and to care for the ones He loves. Then we will hear Him say, ***'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'***

Amen

NOW MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING, KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS IN TO LIFE EVERLASTING.