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Trinity Lutheran Church
Decatur, Illinois
2nd Last Sunday Of Ch Year
November 15th, 2020

“The Parable Of The Talents”

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

(The text for our message is Jesus’ Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. Be seated.)

(((“The kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a long journey, who entrusted His property to his servants. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought five more. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘You entrusted me with five talents. See I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master’s happiness.”

Then the man who had received one talent came...and said, “I was afraid of you, and went and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ‘You wicked and lazy servant. So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed? You should have at least put my money in the bank, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.....therefore, throw that worthless servant into the darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.”)))

Dear Friends in Christ,

Whether you and I regard our Lord’s 2nd coming as something ‘less than desirable’, because we’re too in love with this world; or whether we believe Jesus can’t return soon enough, as we yearn to go home to heaven; either way, Jesus tells us that He is returning soon; when His heavenly kingdom - and the PUBLIC JUDGMENT that accompanies it - will finally, visibly, and publicly break in. And all who are in Christ, will enter into the joys of paradise, which have no end. Hebrews 9:28 promises, “**He is coming again to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.**’ Page 1

So what will happen when Jesus returns? Malachi 3 says, “***And you will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God (the righteous) and those who do not serve Him (the wicked).***”

The time in between Jesus’ first coming at Christmas, and His second coming on the last day is called the Gospel age, in which the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation that Jesus purchased with His blood, and which He validated by His resurrection, are given out to all sinners. Now, as with any gift, you have two options: you can either receive the gift or reject the gift; which brings us to the ‘Parable of the three servants’. In the parable, a master entrusts his property to his servants. Jesus said in Luke 12, “***(My) Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.***” Each servant is entrusted with the master’s gifts, in the form of ‘talents’. Now, one talent equaled about 20 years’ worth of wages - no small chunk of change: to one servant he gave five talents, to another ‘two’, and to a third ‘one’. Now, to understand Jesus’ parable, the ‘talent’ the Master gives is, above all, His kingdom, and the forgiveness, life, and salvation that are already ours’ in Jesus, free of charge, no strings attached. That’s the greatest talent or sweetest deal we’ve ever received in our lives.

So, after giving the servants their talents - which represents God’s kingdom and the forgiveness, life and salvation that are ours’ in Jesus - the master went away; which refers to Jesus’ Ascension into heaven. Now while the master was gone, the first two servants put their talents to work – they put God’s kingdom, forgiveness, life, and salvation to work – live it, give it - not to win their master’s love and happiness, but ‘out of the Good News that their master already loved them and was happy with them’ The one who had five talents, earned five more. Galatians 2 says, “***The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.***’ The one who had two talents made two more 1st John 4, “***We love, because He first loved us, and gave His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***” But the 3rd servant put his Master’s talent – God’s kingdom, and Jesus’ forgiveness, life, and salvation - in a Folger’s coffee can, and buried it in the back yard. Finally, after a long time, the master returned to settle accounts, which refers to Jesus’ 2nd coming to judge the living and the dead – and that Judgment will be on the basis of what we did with Jesus, and His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. Those who love Jesus, because “***He first loved us and gave Himself up for us***”, need not fear that day. On Judgment Day when the books are opened, what we’ll find is that all of our sins have already been marked ‘Paid In Full’, with the indelible ink of Jesus’ blood. **Page 2**

Now, as it played out in our parable, when the Master returns, the two who took their talent – God’s kingdom, and the forgiveness, life and salvation we have in Jesus – and joyfully lived their lives out of love for their Master who is already happy with us, because of Jesus’ forgiving blood, are praised with a hearty: “***Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Come and share your in master’s happiness.***” They’re praised, not because of their results, but because of their faith in Jesus that led to their results. But the third servant is condemned and thrown out into the eternal unemployment line of hell, not because of his lack of results, but because of His lack of faith in Jesus, and in God’s grace, that led to his lack of results.

Now the third servant is the key to understanding the judgment. Why didn’t he turn a profit? Why didn’t he do business at all? Why didn’t he invest the talent that was freely given to him? He had nothing to lose. After all, it was His Master’s ‘talent’.

)And His master made no demands, that He hadn’t already met). He gave them all of their riches in the first place. He simply set His servants free to live their lives out of the Good News that He was already happy with them, and his entire kingdom was theirs’ to enjoy and give away, until He returns. The master knew His talent was good – His entire kingdom, free forgiveness, life and salvation. So why did the 3rd servant bury it in a Folger’s can in the back yard, and just sit on the lid?

Why do we? Why do we bury that Jesus Stuff in our lives? Jesus bought God’s entire kingdom, forgiveness, life, and salvation for everyone on Good Friday. And He buried it in the back yard of each of our lives. He then unearthed God’s entire kingdom, forgiveness, life and salvation on Easter morning, and gave it to us personally in our Baptism. There’s nothing we need to do to gain our Master’s happiness. Our Master simply calls us to lives in, and give out, His entire kingdom, forgiveness, life, and salvation that are already ours’ in Jesus. So why do we bury the Good News of the Savior who checked into His grave dead for our forgiveness, and checked back out of His grave alive for our salvation? Is it because we love sin more than Jesus? Or are we embarrassed clinging to the only One who solved the problem of death? Or maybe it’s because we think God is a mean judge, who isn’t already happy with us in Jesus, so we try to hide Him – out of sight, out of mind? The danger is we may end up burying the Good News of Jesus so deeply that we lose it for ourselves, and never find it again. The sin of the third servant is that He didn’t put the Good News of Jesus to use!

We try to live life incognito. But you can't just unbury a dusty baptismal certificate on judgment day, that you've buried behind a life of sin and unbelief, and expect Jesus to say "***Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into my happiness.***" He won't. But why would we ever want to bury this Good News in the Folger's can of unbelief? Jesus and His gifts are the sweetest deal we've ever been given - God isn't mad at us anymore, but is, in fact, happy with us, through Jesus' forgiving blood, and His perfect righteousness given to us in Baptism. The danger in living your life 'incognito', trying to hide, bury, or forget the Jesus who saved you, is this: "***whoever denies Me before men, I will deny him before my Father in heaven. But whoever confesses me before men, I will confess him before my Father in heaven.***"

Robert Capon, an Episcopalian priest, says, "*This parable shows us the sheer needlessness of fear, the utter non-necessity of our ever having to dread God in Christ. The servant with his little shovel, and his mouse-like fear: that God is as small as himself, is a fool. He is just one more pitiful character that Jesus parades before us, through His parables to shock us, if possible, into recognizing the ridiculousness of non-belief. The older brother of the prodigal son who gets ticked off that his brother is forgiven, the man without wedding garments who tries to sneak into heaven on his own terms, the foolish virgins who forget the oil they need to keep their fire burning, the laborers who worked all day thinking they've earned the kingdom, while others haven't, the Pharisee who tried to weezle God into thinking he was a good egg – all of these are foolish figures designed to elicit in us a smile at the preposterousness of their unbelief. It is also true that they are the figures we most easily identify with. But that is because we are just as preposterous in not believing. We spend our lives invoking upon ourselves necessities that God has not invoked (believing we must pay for what Jesus has already paid for), or creating God in our own image – and all the while He is beating us over the head with the Good News that we've already been vindicated in Christ, and given God's entire kingdom. God isn't trying to hurt anyone; He's not even mad at anyone. And there are no lengths to which He won't go to prove there are no restrictions on the joys He wants us to have.*"

Luther once said, *“You have the God you believe in. If you believe that God is a harsh judge who gives everyone what they deserve, that you must tippy-toe around, that’s the God you will have. But if you believe God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, and that He forgives sin and justifies the sinner all for Jesus’ sake; that’s the God you will have. The servant gets the master he believes he has: a harsh, mean God he dare not upset, rather than a Gospel God, who is already happy with him in Jesus.”* In the end the 3rd servant loses His talent - *the Gospel is rejectable* - that He buried out of fear, and is cast out of His master’s house into the place of utter darkness where there is weeping, and gnashing of teeth. And that’s the hell of it.

The first two servants live boldly and freely for their master, knowing that they live in a grace they don’t have to earn and won’t be taken away from them. The first two servants live boldly and freely for their master, knowing that they’ve got nothing to lose; nor do we. To them Jesus will say, *‘Come and share in your master’s happiness’* at the party to end all parties. It will be the fattened calf served up for prodigals who did nothing but come home to a Father Who never stopped loving them. It will be the free champagne and caviar for wedding guests who did nothing but wear the bridal wedding clothes, their king dressed them in. It will be the full pay – the entire kingdom - for ‘no-work-at-all’ grape pickers who just said ‘yes’ to a last-minute promise.

What was lacking in the third servant was not a lack of profit, but a lack of faith that he had a loving Master, and not a harsh judge, even before he lifted the shovel to bury the kingdom, forgiveness, life, and salvation, that he feared losing because he foolishly figured, that his God was a harsh God, who quickly flies off the handle, rather than the God who puts his own Son to death. So He buried the kingdom and forgiveness so deeply, he couldn’t find it anymore; not even for himself. As a result, he got what he believed he had: a harsh judge. Had he believed his master was gracious that’s what he would have received. Again, Robert Capon says, *“The only reason judgment enters our parable at all is the sad fact that there will always be ‘dummies’ who refuse to trust in a good thing when it’s handed to them on a silver platter, or on a bloody cross.”* The reality is the whole world has already been accepted by God, when Jesus died on the Cross. And the only way we will not enter into our Master’s house and happiness is if we refuse the fact that He’s already accepted us.

In closing, you have nothing to lose in living your life for Jesus, in Whom you already live in the Father's Good Graces, and already have the Father's entire kingdom for free. You're already in on the wedding. Judgment Day is already behind you, at the cross. You are free to live boldly for the God Who is already happy with you in Jesus. Romans 8:1 promises, "***There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***" In Christ, God already sees you as a good and faithful servant. He's already closed the book of the Law that condemned us, two thousand years ago on Calvary.

The talent you've been given freely of God's kingdom, forgiveness, life, and salvation, is to be shared, not hoarded; broadcast, not buried; told, not held in secret; lived, not hidden! Why? Here's why. We have a good, good Father, who justifies the ungodly, and declares the guilty innocent in the blood of Jesus. That's your talent from God, to live and give, boldly and freely, so that others will see they're included in the death and resurrection of Jesus too, until the day Jesus says to you, "**Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Come and share in your master's happiness.**" **AMEN.**