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Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church, Columbia, TN
“You Are a Gifted Servant”¹
Text: Matthew 25:14-30
Pentecost 24 – 10/23/11

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dear friends.

Our text for today is the gospel lesson—the Parable of the Talents. Let’s begin with prayer,
“Lord, to us are given gifts divine; All talents you have sent.
Inspire us now to use them well your kingdom to extend.
We hold each gift a trust from you nor claim it as our own;
We gratefully acknowledge, Lord, all things are yours alone. Amen.” (CW 481)

To be able to work for someone is a privilege, a blessing, and a joy. We don’t always think that way do we, but it is very true. I see it in my 1 ½ year old who imitates cleaning and picking up around the house. So when she thinks that dinner is done she starts gathering up all the dishes—she wants to be a part of that work; she gets excited. I see it in my boys when they want to do those outdoor projects with dad. We can look at Adam in the Garden of Eden. God says, “I’ve given you this garden to care for, and I have given you this woman to care for as well.” Adam rejoiced in these opportunities to work. He saw them as a joy and a privilege.

There is another way to look at it: 10% of Americans are unemployed today. You ask them if being able to work for someone is a gift, a joy, and a privilege. Those who have worked for 20 years but then find themselves laid off; or college students who have invested so much time getting a degree and now nobody wants them. There’s the financial burden, certainly, but there also has to be the emotional side of imagining, “Am I that worthless?” which is not true. There can be an identity crisis when nobody wants you to work for them.

Today we get our eyes off this world, and we set our eyes on God’s kingdom. We have a parable about God’s kingdom. What’s neat about God’s kingdom is that there is 0% unemployment. Everyone works as God’s servant in God’s kingdom. **You are God’s gifted servant.** That is the truth that is on display for us in our text. You are a gifted servant for God. And as we consider this truth we will see how this displays Christ’s love for you and how being God’s gifted servant also displays your calling in life.

As we begin peering into this parable, let’s focus in on the master. What was he like? He was rich—very rich. The master was also very **generous, kind, and loving.** You can see the master’s generosity in that he places his estate into the hands of his servants. Imagine being one of those servants to whom the master has said, “Here is a large portion of what is mine, and I want you to be in charge of it. I want you to manage it for me.” That’s generosity. That’s kindness.

You also see how he apportions his estate out to each of his servants, *each according to their ability.* In the back of your mind you might think, “That’s not fair! He’s giving different

¹ This sermon was originally part of the stewardship series “Christ’s Love our Calling,” which Pastor Gensmer modified and made his own. He recognizes that not all the thoughts or phrases in this sermon are original to him.

amounts to different people!” But it’s not unfair, it’s loving. He *knew* each of his servants. He knew what would be a good thing for them to manage. He set each one of them up for success. The manager was wise. He was also good and generous.

Of course, Jesus is calling our attention to how our God is generous, good, and loving as he calls us to be his stewards. We see that our Lord and Master is generous in the talents he has entrusted to us. In a few moments we will confess our faith using Luther’s explanation of the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed. We will say, “I believe that God made me and all that exists and that he gave me my body and soul, my eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.” I believe that who I am, and everything that makes me up, is God’s gift to me. This is God’s gift to me! We often use the phrase, “You are gifted!” When we hear that we tend to get sinfully proud, “Yeah, look at me, I’m gifted!” But a gift is something that is given to you. Your abilities and everything about you are gifts and talents that God has given you. When we see how God has made us, that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, how unique each of us is, we say, “God, thank you!” You see God’s love in the fact that you are uniquely gifted.

We also see God’s love in the fact that you are a GIFTED servant, who has been called to serve him. I like to watch Donald Trump’s “Apprentice.” The premise of the show is that there are many people who want to work for Donald Trump. So they are putting forth their best effort, giving their best resume so that Donald Trump will hire them. They are all competing with one another because it is an honor. They are all competing to be the one that he chooses, but the one we want to work for is so far higher than Donald Trump. We are talking about the Creator. The Savior. “Lord, I want you to entrust me with some of your gifts, some of your kingdom, so that I can manage it for you.” Consider what is going on here. “Why should I hire you? Why should I have *you* work for me?” God might say. You think about putting together a resume. When you put together a resume you put your best foot forward. We would put a few things aside to show our better qualities. I had to laugh recently when I read that many employers are now going beyond resumes and now requiring that they see people’s Facebook pages. The idea is that you get a slice of what this person is really like. It’s interesting that there are often things on the Facebook pages—things that are said, pictures that are shown, or groups that you’re a part of—that makes the employer wonder, “Perhaps you’re not so squeaky clean after all.” There is no small, little squeaky clean part of our life that we can put before God and say, “God, this is why you should hire me.” Rather, God knows everything about us—every little word that has slipped off our tongue and every little action—every little slice of our life lays bare before him.

Why should God ever hire us and have us work in his kingdom? Why would God ever entrust us to do anything for him? We might call it crazy for God to do that, but God calls it gracious. In his undeserved love, God says, “I want you to work for me. I know you. But I have forgiven you in Jesus’ name for all of your sins. And the fact that I am calling you to work for me in my kingdom is just another way for you to know that I love you, I forgive you, you are at peace with me, and you are mine.”

Consider how this is how Jesus handled Peter. Peter had denied Jesus three times when Jesus needed him most. What guilt must have laid upon his heart that he had denied Jesus! But Jesus forgave Peter. He restored Peter by calling Peter back to work for him. “Peter, feed my sheep.” “Peter, come back to work for me. Continue to be my disciple. Continue to serve

me. Feed my sheep.” In these words, it was Jesus assuring Peter that he was forgiven and still belonging to Jesus.

How blessed we are that God calls us to service. It is a demonstration of Christ’s love for us. It is also a reminder of why we are here – the purpose of our entire life – our calling.

So now we look at the different stewards in our text. There are three of them, but you can really divide them into two groups. As the master has now entrusted these servants with their tasks, their talents, the first group is faithful. The first two are excited about the task given them. They recognize this task as an honor and a privilege. **They are filled with joy to be able to work for their master. These two sprang into action “at once.” They made the most of their gifts. They work diligently. They were excited to say, “Master, here is what you have given us, and here is what resulted.” They were thrilled to show the master what they had done.** Then the master doesn’t measure the results, but says, “Well done, good and *faithful* servant!”

Then you have the other one. When he was given his task, he doesn’t do anything with the talent given him. Well, he does. He takes it and actually expends the effort to dig a hole and dump the talent in the hole and cover it up. It would have been a lot easier to take it to the bank where it would have made a little bit of interest. What you see in that final servant’s heart is someone who doesn’t really care about his master, who doesn’t find it a joy to work for his master, who doesn’t see the generosity and love of his master. Instead he wants nothing to do with his master. Finally, when the master returns, “Here is what you gave me. I didn’t do anything with it. But the only reason I didn’t is that you are mean. You are not nice.” You can hear the attitude in the final servant’s heart that led to the unfaithfulness.

The question then is, “How about us? Who are we?” As God has entrusted us with our talents—whether that’s our abilities and skills or as it in this text an amount of money—are we being *faithful* with what God has entrusted us? Do we manage what God has entrusted to us well?

This is a challenging question. It is challenging because there is no legalistic line just to draw that fits every one of God’s stewards. Some churches will say you have to legalistically give 10% of your wealth to church. Others seem to set it up that everyone has to have a name badge where you have a certain task organized within the church records (that you are the assistant to the church parking attendant) and having such a “job” shows you are being faithful. That’s not what faithfulness is. That’s not what being a faithful steward is. There is no line to say, “If you all do this, then I know you are being faithful,” because God has gifted each of us in different ways. **He has entrusted each of us in different ways. Being faithful will look different from person to person.**

Are we being faithful? Maybe the best answer is this – thinking of the word faithful as “faith-full”. **Are we full of faith? Do we see that our God is a generous loving God? Do we have faith that everything we have is an incredible bestowal of blessing from the God from whom all blessings flow? Do we believe that the fact God calls us to service is an incredible privilege and a show of love that GOD would call US to work in HIS kingdom?**

When that is where our heart centers – on God’s love – that love produces in us a new attitude. “Lord, I want to serve you. I want to use what you have given me well. Whatever you have given me, I want to use it well. Whether that’s in my offering, my money, or my time, I want it all to be used to your glory.”

And we know we all fall short of being fully faithful, aren't we? But we are reminded once more of how much God loves us – that he would forgive us for our unfaithfulness. In that forgiveness, God calls us back to service. And we realize, "Wow, what an opportunity we have with the rest of our lives with our money, with our abilities to use all this for God's kingdom and for his glory."

It has been fun to see the kingdom at work today. We see different talents being used. Do you see the young man reading the Scripture lessons to get a taste of serving in the public ministry? A pianist who comes here every week and faithfully plays the music to lead us in worship? Do you see the people who have put together the bulletin? Who make sure the lights work? Who make sure the coffee is on in the morning? People who welcome you and encourage you and say, "Hi," to the visitors? There are volunteers who sit in the nursery to watch the little ones, and little children who come up front and sing their hearts out for us. Sunday school teachers who prep their lessons. All sorts of people who are gifted in different ways by God; all serving God. And you are too. You are a gifted servant. We praise God that he has gifted you. We praise God that he has called you into his kingdom, into his service. And we go forward working for him. Seeing it as a joy, a privilege, and an honor. Amen.