

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Trinity, November 17, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 398, 417:1, 405, 400, 416.

Lessons: Exodus 3:1-4:14, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Luke 19:11-27

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:13-30.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

A newspaper columnist once wrote “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left and could say, I used everything you gave me.” What a marvelous way for a Christian to greet Jesus Christ on judgment day!

That is exactly what Jesus wants, and our text presents that idea in the context of judgment day, together with a warning not to misuse our talents, meaning the gifts and abilities with which God has blessed us.

Right away let us be clear what is meant by our talents. This includes all the intellectual and physical abilities we are born with and those we develop as we mature. It includes all the material possessions that rightfully come into our hands, including money and the many opportunities God provides for us to use our abilities to serve him and our neighbor.

But when we consider all our talents, we must remember that God makes it clear that

TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN OF HIM SHALL MUCH BE EXPECTED

- 1. The parable spoken to Jesus’ disciples. and**
- 2. Application of this parable to our lives.**

This idea is repeated a number of times in Scripture. In Luke 12:48 we read *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*

When we realize that this parable is told in the context of judgment day, we realize that the man is Jesus, and he is going to ascend into heaven to come again, when he will come to judge the living and the dead.

The Lord *“entrusted his property to”* his servants. The exact value of a talent is not important except to realize that the amount of gold or silver in the weight called “talent” is well over 75 pounds. So it is a very valuable thing that he made his servants stewards over. The master distributes these talents to *“each according to his ability.”* That suggests the value of the gifts that the Lord gives each of us, and we even use the word “talents” for such gifts. In fact, our use today of the word talent is derived from this biblical parable.

The gifts or talents that our ascended Lord distributes to all believers are never exactly the same for any two individuals as you heard in our epistle lesson. God gives to each of us the gifts that are exactly right. In every case he provides the correct combination of abilities, talents, responsibilities, and opportunities, so that all of us can serve him in his kingdom. Here we are encouraged to dedicate our talents to the Lord.

“The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.”

Surely Jesus also has something to say here about how we spend our money. It’s not only the money we put into the offering plate on Sunday that concerns Jesus. The money we spend on everything in our life from groceries to recreation and everything else is also part of wise use of all the gifts God has given us. We call this Christian stewardship. Whatever you have been given, God is looking for faithfulness.

But these gifts are given in different proportions. One received five, another two, and another just one. The men with five and two made wise use of them, and when he returned, the *"master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'"* The master pronounces the same verdict on both the servants who increased the talents entrusted to them. They had been faithful with their talents and that was all their master asked of them. It is for their faithfulness that they are commended rather than for their accomplishments. One person may be entrusted with certain gifts and another with a different endowment, one with more and another with less. These gifts are all from God who is free to give his gifts to anyone, but the reason for all is the same. As we have received, so it will be expected of us.

"But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money." This man neglected to use his divinely imparted gifts. Notice that there is no evidence of wasting his substance in riotous living. This parable shows that he simply failed to use his talent for his master's benefit. There is no suggestion that he spent a penny of his Lord's treasure for himself. He was really guilty of laziness, negligent and indifference

God's workers must be actively serving and working.

This servant fails to get his reward, with his own words judging him for his unfaithfulness. *"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"* He is punished. His gift is taken from him, and he is excluded from the kingdom of glory. So he didn't merely forfeit his talent, but also he was thrown into the everlasting torment of hell.

The warning is for those who hide their talents and do not use them. The wicked, lazy servant actually condemns himself. An unused talent cannot be kept for long. Like an unused muscle, it wastes away

God gives many and great blessings. To many he gives greater blessings. And with greater blessings come greater responsibilities.

Think about the earthly blessings the Lord provides you with. Are they all only for our own enjoyment or benefit? Of course not. The Bible also makes clear that we are to do things for others. For example, we are to help the poor. We should not use Jesus' words *"the poor you will always have with you"* (Mark 14:7) as an excuse for not doing things. We should use his words as an opportunity to help others.

In addition, the New Testament also makes it clear that the work of the church is to be supported by the church, just as in the Old Testament the entire tribe of the Levites and priests were to be supported by the entire nation of the people of God, the other 11 tribes.

Those who have been blessed have the responsibility of sharing those material blessings.

God has been delivering his gifts to people in each generation and we must expect an accounting. All Christians have been entrusted with gifts, for which they will have to give an account.

We can say the same thing about mental and spiritual blessings as well as material blessings. First of all let me use the example of those of you who have been called – be it ever so informally – to conduct worship services or Bible Classes. At Faith you may have never known or felt or believed that you could do those things. At Christ our Redeemer, this congregation started with some of you doing those very things – conducting worship services in your own living rooms. Some of you have been called and elected to serve on church council, as chairman, secretary, treasurer or to serve as a committee member. When there was a need for musicians or Sunday School or Bible Class teachers, you may have realized that you could play hymns and liturgy and teach the children of others.

Sometimes we imagine that it is sincere modesty and humility that cause us to refuse to be of any special service to God and his kingdom. We say, 'I'm not qualified.' Or 'I'm not well enough acquainted with the

Scriptures.’ Or ‘Let someone else serve on the church council – teach Sunday school – teach our young people – do the things that need to be done to keep the Lord’s property in good shape.’

It is one thing to be humble and modest but it is another thing to use false modesty as a cloak for laziness, selfishness, or indifference. We can count on God to give us the necessary wisdom, courage, and skills, so we can go ahead with confidence and do the work he has given us to do.

We dare not use the excuse ‘my gifts are not very numerous so the Lord surely cannot expect much from me.’

We must think of those who are capable of serving but hide from active service. This would be such people who say that they have no time to serve or to help, or those who will not share their time, experience, and abilities to benefit others. To those who claim they have no talent for that sort of thing. In short to shirkers. Think of the one who is himself a Christian believer but who will not take off his coat and roll up his sleeves in an effort to extend Christianity. Are such people any different from the man who dug a hole in the ground and buried his talent there?

The master needs people who will sacrifice their childish pride to him and his cause.

Even a secular writer said ‘I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything but I can do something and I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.’

We are all afraid of making mistakes. The fear of a blunder or appearing a little awkward has kept many people from doing a world of good while making a few mistakes. The ability of most people for public prayer or public witnessing for Christ may not be great. They are afraid of saying the wrong thing, and as a result they say nothing. But each of us can say, even privately, what we believe and how important God and his Word are to us.

Most of us would place ourselves into the category of the servant with only one talent. That may be where most of us belong. But that surely is no excuse for being unfaithful with what God has given us. It will not do at all for any of us to say ‘I can’t do much so it is all right if I don’t do anything.’ ‘It won’t really make any difference.’ But we are told that in an election even one vote can make a difference. How many elections in our country would have come out differently if only one person in each voting district or precinct had supported a cause and voted differently?

It may be true that the work of God’s kingdom will get done without the support of those who have very limited means and talents. But we need to realize that God calls upon us to serve him with our individual talents, not because he cannot get along without our help, but rather because faithful service to him is also of great value to those who do the serving. Remember ***"the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*** (Acts 20:35 NIV)

I think many of you adults know someone who wasted their mental gifts, who wasted their potential or their ‘promise’, who may have been or seemed to be very intelligent or very gifted in some way. They never managed to fulfill their potential or accomplish what others and perhaps even they themselves thought they should do. And yet for some reason or another – and sin is behind everything – they never made full use of their gifts. When sin in one’s life becomes one’s master it is hard to fulfill the potential that God may have in mind for us.

We really don’t know what God has in mind for us until we actually do things or work at doing some of those kinds of things to serve God and our fellow men. In our own congregations we have seen that kind of positive example.

And these gifts are not only spiritual, but also wealth, reputation, ability, which are given to men to be used for spiritual ends. And there will also be a reckoning for those to whom these gifts are given.

And so from this parable we see that we must exert energy and faithfulness in the use of our abilities, with plain everyday faithfulness to duty. This is a warning against habitual laziness. We must remember that all service ranks the same with God. There is no first or last. May we be blessed with these words of our Lord on judgment day: ***'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 your master's happiness!'*** Amen.