

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity, November 5, 2023

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

Hymns: 8, 31:1-2, 36, 496, 45.

Lessons: 1 Chronicles 29:1-13, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Matthew 25:14-30.

Sermon Text: Luke 19:11-27

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We just celebrated the Reformation. Martin Luther discovered in the Bible what God really says. He had made time for the study of Scripture, and he had a calling to study the scriptures. God had called Luther to study scripture, not to be a lawyer as he originally intended.

But don't you, too, have a calling to study the scriptures? You are to "***Search the scriptures; [Christ tells us] for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.***" John 5:39 (KJV) From Scripture you learn about Jesus and what he has done for you.

What has God called you to do on earth? Oh, yes, you may be a father, mother, son, daughter, businessman, farmer, teacher, worker – whatever your occupation is in a worldly, secular sense. But God has called you to something much greater than all the earthly things you do on earth. He has called you to be his disciple, his follower. In the parable before us, we see that

CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS HAVE IMPORTANT WORK TO DO BEFORE HE RETURNS.

- 1. God gives gifts he expects his followers to use wisely.**
- 2. Jesus' parable shows how people use the gifts God provides for us.**
- 3. From Jesus' parable we can see what his followers should be doing until he returns.**

At the time he told this parable, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. People mistakenly believed that the kingdom of God was about to appear immediately. After all, Jesus had been talking about the kingdom of God.

We see two ideas in our sermon text, in the parable Jesus tells.

The first idea is about a man of noble birth, who was to become king. But the people didn't want him to be their king. If we make application of this parable to Jesus becoming the king, it certainly fits that people didn't want him to rule their hearts. That is really true of so many in the world today. They don't want to be ruled by Jesus. They want to do their own thing and they pay no attention to what Jesus says – unless they twist what he says to make it sound like Jesus is approving of the wicked things they do. But that idea is deserving of another sermon.

When we look at the details found in this parable, we find important ideas about using what God has entrusted to us.

In Jesus' parable, a nobleman put 10 of his servants to work and entrusted them with a valuable earthly gift to take care of. These were large amounts of money to use, to put to work until the master returned. He gave them an amount of money called a "mina". This was an amount worth a little more than three months wages. You can compare that to your income to realize how large a sum this was. "***Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'***"

When he returned home, "***he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.***" There were drastically different results from how his servants used his money.

“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’” This was an excellent return – ten times – on the master’s money, and the master recognized that. ***“‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’”***

The servant had no idea what kind of a reward he would receive. He no doubt realized from the beginning that this money was not just his to do with as he wanted. As a result of his wise use of the master’s money, this servant was given a position of great responsibility, because he had been extremely responsible with his master’s money. There was a great reward for this faithful one.

“The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ “His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’” This servant was very responsible, too. He had a 500% return, and compared to financial returns people are getting today, this is a remarkable return. The master gives great rewards to this servant, too.

Then we hear about another servant: ***“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’ His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’”*** This man did not do anything with the gift the Lord had given him. The master used the wicked servant’s own words to judge him. He asks why didn’t you at least put it in the bank, just as we might deposit money in a bank to at least earn a small amount of interest.

The master has no patience for this servant who did nothing with the gift entrusted to him. ***“He said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’”*** Just that quickly the gift was taken away from him. Now he had nothing.

But people observing this didn’t think this was fair. ***‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’*** “[The master] ***replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.’”***

The first two were patiently waiting for the master and were actively working for him. The third loses what he had because he didn’t use it. We find that principle in many areas of life. If you don’t use a muscle, it grows weak and atrophies. If you don’t use a skill regularly, you lose that skill. If you know how to play a musical instrument and stop doing it, the ability slips away from you. If you stop doing things you are skilled at, you lose those abilities. This man didn’t use the gift the master had given him and he completely lost it.

From our Gospel lesson with a similar picture, we hear the master saying ***“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.”*** (Matthew 25:26–27, NIV84) Although the “talent” in our Gospel lesson was much more valuable than the mina, the same picture applies.

This parable, like our Gospel lesson, shows servants who all should be working for the master. The parables are similar but not identical. Yet they both teach an important lesson. God gives gifts to mankind and expects everyone to make use of those gifts.

All Christians are entrusted with gifts from God.

We could even think of the believers after Pentecost. They shared what they had. They gave what they could for the use of fellow believers and for the Lord and they joined in prayer and worship daily.

The Apostle Paul in writing to Christians in Ephesus had this to say. ***“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.’”*** Then Paul speaks of gifts given to different believers as servants in the church. ***“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*** (Ephesians 4:1–13, NIV84)

But even if you haven't been called by God to be an apostle like Paul or called by a congregation to be a pastor, there are gifts you have been given.

Are you using those gifts for God?

Our epistle lesson lists a number of gifts beyond actually serving as leaders in the church. Listen again as Paul identifies gifts given especially to the early church: ***“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”*** (1 Corinthians 12:1–11, NIV84)

To use another picture from Scripture, you are part of the body of Christ. We read in Ephesians: ***“From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*** (Ephesians 4:16, NIV84)

Let's mention first your calling to share the Word of God. You may have gifts and abilities for these things which you may never have used: We read from Matthew 28: ***“go and make disciples of all nations”*** (Matthew 28:19, NIV84) We read from Mark 16: ***“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*** (Mark 16:15, NIV84) and we read from Acts 1: ***“you will be my witnesses.”*** (Acts 1:8, NIV84)

And you may have other gifts you haven't used: preaching or conducting worship services. Teaching – children, Sunday School, Bible Class. Witnessing with your words and your lives. And think of the earthly skills needed by our churches: Building, repairing, maintaining. Cleaning. Giving. And there are many ways we can give. Perhaps you remember the Christmas carol about the little drummer boy. He sang: “I have no gift to bring That's fit to give our King. I played my drum for Him. I played my best for Him.” It may be a simple little picture, but the idea is to serve God in any and every way you can.

And of course, you can serve God in your family in many ways, just as you can serve God in your Christian Family in many ways.

The bottom line is: Use your gifts from God! God has worked faith in you. You know that Jesus Christ died for your sins. Remember that is the most precious gift God can give you and you can give anyone.

What gifts do you have from God? How can you serve him each day?

May we be like the servant who used his one gift to gain 10 more for our Master! May our Lord tell each of us on Judgment Day: ***“Well done, good and faithful servant!”*** (Matthew 25:23, NIV84) Amen.