

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church  
5<sup>th</sup> Midweek Lenten Vespers Service**

**Text: Matthew 25: 14-30**

**Theme: *The Sin of Despair - The Parable of the Talents***

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***Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground.***

This evening we continue our penitential reflections on the basis of selected parables of our Lord as we look forward to the passion and cross of our Lord. The parable of the talents provides some additional consideration about how we view ourselves as the people of God with the calling to be of some earthly good as we await our Lord ushering us into glory. The cross life of the Christian is also a live of vocation - serving Christ in serving the neighbors He gives to us as we exercise our faith in life. The Scriptures admonish us not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. But then, on the basis of this parable, we do not want to disparage who we are and how we have been outfitted for service in this world by the Lord of all gifts and abilities - or as the parable represents them - *talents*.

Let's review the gist of the parable. The master has given various amounts of his wealth to his servants according to their ability to invest in his behalf. A talent was a measure of mass as in a quantity of precious metal and was a measure of money or wealth. The term since the telling of this parable by our Lord has also come to mean a degree of ability or skill. For its first hearers, however, it was understood as an amount of wealth that was given to servants according to the master's estimation of their ability to invest it for a profit. The focus is upon the servant estimated to be on the bottom of the ability grade. He is given but one talent, which then, he promptly buries in the ground. When after a long time had past, an accounting is made by the master of the servants and those who received multiple talents doubled what was intrusted to them. Each of them in turn receives a commendation from the master for their work: *Well done thou good and faithful servant, You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much*. When the one talent man indicated that he buried and is returning the talent he was given to invest . . . he is condemned as wicked and slothful, the talent is taken from him, and he is tossed out on his hear into the outer darkness. In a positive sense, when just looking at the five through two talent servants we can appreciate how we are to measure our value, value our measure, and then be a measurable value to others giving God the glory. But it is not these talents guys that the parable draws us to. It rather is the one talent guy . . . the guy - whom all might think of in the context of whatever the talent would mean - is in lowest echelon according to talent scouts in the know.

What have we here that we can penitentially take to the cross of Christ this Lenten season? We are often to be on the lookout in our sinful self for the emergence

of a puffed-up sinful pride asserting itself in how we approach our neighbors and the tasks of our various vocational callings. It always brings a *what about me* or a *look how good I am doing* into all reflections and estimations of ourselves and we they can have the due consideration of all. We've got skills and we want others to duly appreciate them as much as possible. Which of us would rather not have others think we are really quite a wonderful and talented piece of God's work. The fat relentless ego puffs us up regularly doesn't it? Yes . . . but not all the time. Sometimes we can feel the reverse. Sometimes we can feel that we are out of the running when it comes to our estimation of our own talents and abilities to get things accomplished or done. Moreover, we may sense that the importance of what we are doing is rather on the low end of things and for that matter declining as we feel ourselves declining. Such thinking can lead to feelings and thoughts of self-deprecation and despair.

This temptation is especially a real tug in our thinking and sentiments about ourselves when we fall into the trap of tying how we think about our importance, value, and self-worth as determined by how much and how important we see ourselves being successful. Such temptation is the first sin of pride that is a form of idolatry. Yes, it is idolatry because it see within our own person and abilities the power to accomplish good things for others. We may sing; *praise God from whom all blessings flow*, but the sinful self is taking credit for as much as possible. Such idolatry from pride which refuses to see God as the one who is blessing our labors with good outcomes, but it is just the prelude to a much more deadly temptation up the way. Let me explain, and use this parable to illustrate.

Just who is this one talent servant of the master in the parable? I would like to suggest that in time . . . it is going to be you . . .and you . . .and you . . .all of us at some time up the way. Regardless of how many talents you may see yourself above that bottom one-talent grade in the parable, you will probably become there at some point up the way when the things you can do, the things you can figure out, the things you can fix, accomplish, and achieve are going to be on the decline. They will be declining as you decline on your way to the ashes and dust that will be returning to ashes and dust as we acknowledged about ourselves on Ash Wednesday. The more the curse of the ground begins to claim you and move you to progressively to physical decay . . . the more incapacitated you will become and your talents and abilities are going to shrink. For some of us . . . we are well on our way already. And to whatever extent we have been seeing our self-worth and importance as being based on what we can produce or accomplish, the more we can become depressed and despair of our own worth and value. And when that happens we just stop and bury our one remaining talent and withdraw from the life of serving Christ in our neighbor's need. We think it no longer worth it because we are no longer worth it.

What do we need when we are tempted to value ourselves according to our talents and then be tempted to discount and despair of our worth on that basis, when

we decline as though we no longer are living a life worth living? What we one talent servants, or sometime to become one talent servants, need to do is to follow our very talented Lord and Savior to his passion and cross. We will behold his quality of life take some real hits in the context of his trials, his beatings, and his crucifixion. As the Son of Man, the second Adam . . . do you suppose that his quality of life was suffering greatly? Yet, there we see our Lord doing simply according to what He is and was called to do. He was called to be the man among men serving the Father in His service to us and then to passively die for our sins. And in this regard, he did not just loose some talents . . . he became the most despicable and negative sinner as all of ours are placed on him. And yet, we are to remember, especially then, that this is the Father's Son in whom He was and is well pleased . . . dying the poor miserable sinner's death for us.

The point is not to say that we have been called to the Father and given intrinsic worth as we are born of Adam and reborn in the Second Adam. Our worth is wrapped up in the workmanship of God and the righteousness of Christ, and it does not suffer loss as we suffer loss of ability and talents. It does not because our talents were only given to us that we might be honored to be instruments of God's distribution of blessings to others. We ourselves however are to God the priceless treasure where while we were sinners, He sent His Son to redeem and reclaim us to be his own. You are and always have been His pearl of great price . . . before you had any talents, while you use those you have regardless of how many, and when they have all become in this world largely diminished as you head to the doorway into His eternal presence. Do not despair. All the sheep that are gathered, regardless of how many talents they were given, will be praised by our Lord for what He has accomplished through them that is credited also and done unto Him. And you will be among that flock as you pass from complete incapacity - not one talent, NO TALENTS! into glory. And then, He will say to you - *Well done thou God and faithful servant!*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.