

5.16.2021 Sunday after the Ascension

The Parable of the Talents is a story Jesus told about a very wealthy man who was going on a journey and entrusted his property to his servants, servants who he trusted to be good stewards of all that'd been given to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. When the master returned, the servant who'd *“received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘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. Here, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away”* (Matthew 25:14-30).

As you know, I often begin Sunday morning sermons with stories. Stories that I hope will capture your attention, and illustrate a biblical truth in a way that will be relevant and memorable. I often begin a sermon with a story, but it's not often that there's such an immediate and intimate connection between the story we began with and the Scripture that was just read as part of the liturgy. The Parable of the Talents is a story Jesus told that Peter would've heard (perhaps several times) in the three years he spent traveling from town to town with our Lord and the other disciples. When I read today's Epistle, I couldn't help but think that Peter must've had an image in his mind of Jesus telling this story as he wrote these words in his first Epistle, *“As every man*

hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

It's easy to imagine St. Peter thinking of this parable Jesus told as he communicates the truth that, like the servants in the story who were trusted to care for all those things that belonged to their master, we have been entrusted with the gifts and resources of our Father's kingdom. We are stewards of God's gracious gifts, and the Parable of the Talents is a story that would've been so familiar to Peter that it must have formed his thoughts about Christian stewardship, and therefore we can use this parable to better understand what Peter means when he calls us to be “*good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*”

One of the first things we notice when we consider this parable is the great responsibility of being a steward. The KJV tells us that one servant received five talents, another two, and another one, but different translations emphasize the point that these servants were entrusted with tremendous wealth by choosing to translate that verse in such a way that one servant received five bags of gold, another two, and another one (NIV); or that one servant received five thousand gold coins, another two thousand, and another one (GNT). These servants were chosen to be stewards of great wealth, yet how much more have we been entrusted with as chosen stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Every good gift and perfect gift comes from our Father (James 1:17), and like the servants in the parable, these gifts have been placed in our hands by our Lord to do His work. The servants in the story were given wealth - to multiply, and we have been given the gifts of God's kingdom that His grace may be multiplied and “*that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 4:11).

When you read this story you also recognize a striking difference between the two *good and faithful* servants who multiplied all they'd received from their master, and the *wicked and slothful* servant who went and hid what his master had given him. The night and day difference between these servants is a reminder of a truth we've talked about before, the truth that you really can't be a lukewarm, middle-of-the-road Christian, because in Christianity there is

no middle ground. You'll remember Jesus stating that fact this way, "*He that is not with Me is against Me: and He that gathers not with Me scatters*" (Luke 11:23).

The two good and faithful servants, who were with their master, could also be seen as the good soil that Jesus described in another parable, because they each bore fruit a hundredfold (Matthew 13:8). The servant who'd been given five talents made five talents more, and the servant who'd been given two talents made two talents more. They each made a 100% profit for their master. They doubled his money, but the servant who was described as wicked and slothful was not just idle, he was actually working against his master. Remember what the master said to that servant when he returned, *Instead of burying what I trusted you with... "You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest."* This servant was chosen to be a trusted steward, but instead of increasing the wealth that was given to him, he chose to bury that precious gift in the ground, and by doing so he worked against his master by ensuring that gift would be of no benefit to anyone.

St. Peter calls us to be *good stewards of the manifold grace of God*, and when Jesus told this story He illustrated, in a relevant and memorable way, exactly what that means. Good stewards of the manifold grace of God are people who recognize the truth that all we have is not our own. All we have, and all we are, comes from God, belongs to God, and is placed in our trust to the end that His gifts of grace may be multiplied - a hundredfold, and in name of our Savior Christ shared with the world He gave His life to save. A good steward knows that God intends to do good in this world, and that He intends to do good through us.

I'll leave you with this thought: the servants in the parable were trusted with tremendous wealth, yet Christians are chosen stewards who've been trusted with an unspeakable Gift of infinite value. You may remember that the New Testament lesson we read last Sunday ended with these words, "*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*" (Luke 11:13). We have, dwelling in us, the most valuable gift of all - the gift of God Himself. Don't hide that Gift, instead, multiply the Gift of God, be a good

steward by showing, and sharing with others, what you have received from God: the joy of forgiveness, the peace of God which passes understanding, the hope of heaven, and the blessed assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God through Christ our Lord.

Be a good steward, and on the day our Lord returns He will say to you, “Well done, good and faithful one. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”