

TEXT: Matthew 25:14-30

THEME: YOU ARE A GIFTED SERVANT

Dear Christian Friends:

"Of all the sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: *It might have been.*" The poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, penned these words. We don't know what he had in mind when he first wrote them, but we all understand his point: What a sad thing to see wasted talent, wasted resources, wasted opportunities! Or as the old public service announcement put it: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste!"

The verses before us today are an illustration of this same point, but in a more positive way. Jesus says to each of us, "YOU ARE A GIFTED SERVANT!" As you consider your gifts, you also want to reflect on HOW GENEROUSLY YOUR MASTER GIVES and WHAT A JOY IT IS TO USE YOUR GIFTS!

Jesus tells a story here to teach us about using our gifts. There was a rich man, a very rich man, who was going on an extended journey. While he was gone, he wanted to give his servants an opportunity. So he **entrusted his property to them**. The gifts he gives his servants are not small. We might think of those gifts in terms of 5, 10, and 25 thousand dollars. How generous! He also gave to **each according to his ability**. The rich man gave something to each servant, but he gave only what they were able to handle. He does his best to set them up for success.

The point that Jesus is making here is that he, as our Lord and Master, is generous beyond belief with his blessings. Consider our spiritual blessings. God has called us to be his children. In Holy Baptism, he adopted you into his family. In his Word and at his Table, he continues to assure us that he has taken all our sins away. He gives us called workers to preach and teach his Word among us. We can worship together freely with brothers and sisters in the faith. We could go on and on.

Consider your material blessings as well. Each one of you has a unique set of abilities, gifts, and talents. Think of your homes, cars, phones, food, and the time and money you can spend on just having fun! Your Master is so generous! In your calling as children of God, you have the privilege to use the generous gifts of your Master as you live as his gifted servant.

Because of his grace, we may enter our Master's service. How generously he gives! What a truly gifted servant you are! But now, how can we use those gifts with joy?

In the parable, there are two very different responses to the master's generosity. Two servants were very similar and sprang into action **at once**. They were faithful. They made the most of their gifts, both their abilities and the money entrusted to them. They considered it a privilege to return the profit to their master, who said, "**Well done, good and faithful servant!**" Notice what they were commended for: for their faithfulness, not for what they earned.

The third servant was a different story. He was unfaithful in every respect. He “**went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.**” He earned nothing because he did nothing with his abilities or the generous gift of his master.

So, what about us? What is Jesus’ point for us in telling this parable? He wants each one of us to ask ourselves, “Do I understand I am a gifted servant of the Master? Am I living like it? How am I using the gifts my Master has entrusted to me? How faithful have I been in using those gifts?

Most of us do not see ourselves as the five talent guy. We are just regular people. We have our gifts, but they amount to one or maybe two talents. Our gifts are small compared to others. That may be true. Most of us are not making millions. Most of us will not be on TV. Most of us will never fill a concert hall. Most of us will not be pro athletes. So, we may be tempted to think, “I’m not a five talent person. It is no real tragedy if I don’t use my gifts. They are small. They are more use to me than to God anyway. I’m sure he’ll understand.”

But, Jesus pictured the least-gifted servant as the unfaithful one. It wasn’t because he had fewer gifts or used his gifts for an evil purpose. He was unfaithful because he did not use his gifts at all. Here Jesus is telling each one of us, “No matter what your gifts may be, you are to use them faithfully. Your gifts may be different than someone else’s. Your gifts may be less than someone else’s. But each one of you has gifts—gifts especially entrusted to you from God. Be faithful with what you do have.” That is what Jesus expects and that should be our goal!

Consider this specifically in the area of our offerings. How easy it is to make excuses! For those with fewer gifts: “I do not have much. Let those with greater gifts than I support the church. I have nothing to give!” For those with greater gifts: “So what if I’ve been blessed with 20 talents, and give as if I only had two. At least, I am giving *something!* Talk to those who give nothing. I am doing my share to meet the budget and then some!”

Are you being faithful? What motivates you? Are you giving just to fill a need, to meet a budget, to run a church and school? Or are you giving to your generous Master by returning a portion of the generous gifts he has given to you? Jesus wants the latter. How are you using the gifts the Lord has given you? Do you think first of serving yourself or your Lord? Do you, as a gifted servant, have the same priorities as your Master? Have your gifts flowed from a good heart or a grudging one? Have you focused on faithfulness in accordance with your gifts? We know our failings as his servants. We bow our heads. We plead for his mercy. We repent.

Jesus, our Lord and Master, has taken away all of our sins. His blood covers our unfaithfulness, along with our excuses and our lack of gratitude and generosity. And Jesus has made us more than his servants. Paul says, “**The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ**” (**Romans 8:16-17**).

We cling to the promise, “**There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**” (**Romans 8:1**). God accepts our lives of service as a living sacrifice. We can offer

it in joy. Ultimately, he will welcome us into the joy of heaven, but this greatest gift does not come to us because of our faithful service. Rather, it is because of Jesus' service to us. Scripture is clear: "**It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How generous our Master is! How gifted we are! Let us respond in using the gifts he entrusts to us with joy! When we do, we will never have to regret what might have been! Amen.