Matthew 25:14-30
Trinity 24, November 15, 2026
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"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. [15] To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. [16] He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. [17] So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. [18] But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. [19] Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. [20] And he who had 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.' [21] 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.' [22] 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.' [23] 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.' [24] 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, [25] so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' [26] 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? [27] 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. [28] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. [29] 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. [30] And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Life as a sports fan in a small market can be tough. And since I don't think I'm speaking to too many Los Angeles Lakers fans or New York Yankees fans this morning, I think you'll probably agree. When you root for teams in Minnesota, Wisconsin—fly-over country to most Americans—sometimes it feels like the league or the sports media don't want you to have nice things. You get a player that comes up and becomes a superstar on your favorite team, and *immediately* the stories start being published that, "[Such and such a player] is unhappy." "[Such and such a player] wants to be traded." "Where is [such and such a player] going to play next season?"

And I've always been tremendously bothered when those stories start being published about players on *my* favorite teams. I convince myself that various journalists have it out for me, that they have some sort of vendetta against my favorite team, and they're publishing *lies* to try to get my favorite players out of my favorite teams.

But I read an article a few years ago that put things into perspective for me. This journalist had been accused of publishing lies because he *allegedly* wanted a certain player to leave a team. And he explained that he doesn't make things up, he just reports what his sources tell him, and everything he writes is *true* from a certain point-of-view. That point-of-view might belong to the player, or their agent, or their team, or their coach, or *another* team. And every one of these parties has different agendas in leaking information to the journalist. And what the sources say might not be the actual truth in *reality*, but it *is* true to them from their own point-of-view.

And interestingly, that same idea applies to how people think about God. What a person believes to be true about God might not be the actual truth in reality, but it is true for them because on their own point-of-view.

I know what this sounds like. It *sounds* like I'm saying that you can make God whoever you want Him to be, and that your truth might not be my truth and my truth might not be your truth, as if truth is subjective. That is *not* what I'm saying. I do not mean that we can *make* God whatever we want Him to be. Rather, it's a question of who we *believe* God to be. What we believe about God will be true for us.

And that is the case in not just everything you might believe about God, but really just in this *one specific* way. To illustrate that one specific way, let me ask you a question: how do you feel about Judgment Day? Terrified? Do you have nightmares about it? Or are you excited? Are you *longing* for Christ's return with eager anticipation? Your answer to that question *probably* depends on how you feel about the Judge before whom you will be standing on that day. Will He be an angry, demanding master that you cannot hope to satisfy? Or will He be smiling, gracious, forgiving, reaching out to you in love? What do *you* believe about the Judge?

You are correct. That's right, you are right. Either way.

What we will find standing before Christ on Judgment Day will feel exactly the way that we would probably expect. *Either way*. If we *think* that Christ is an angry judge who'll be looking to make us pay with our eternal lives, then that *is* just what He'll be for us. But if we trust that He's our loving and forgiving Redeemer who's been looking forward to the perfect moment to welcome us into His Kingdom, then we'll see Him swinging the gate open to us and leading us home by the hand.

That is the point of this parable. So often, we read this parable and we focus in on the talents, on how we are to invest the talents which God has given us. But really, how we invest the talents which God has given us *totally depends* on what we believe to be true about God. Do we believe what God *tells* us about Himself, or do we *ignore* what God tells us and instead rely on our imagination?

In this parable, there are two stories being told about God, two depictions of God. One is being told by the wicked servant's words and actions, and the other is told by the *master's* words and actions.

From the wicked servant's point-of-view, the master is conniving and scheming and judgmental. What it *looks* like the master is doing is not *really* what the master is doing, according to the wicked servant. It *looks* like the master is being generous, but the wicked servant—he knows better. It's almost like he believes the master has given him this single talent as an opportunity to punish him later. If he invests that talent, puts it at risk and loses *any* of it, then his evil and judgmental master will return and will rebuke him harshly.

Here is the master from the point-of-view of the wicked servant, told in his own words: ***"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."***

He was afraid. He was afraid of the master. He believed the master to be a hard man with whom you simply could not win. And *because* he was afraid of the master, because he *believed* the master to be hard and unforgiving, that is exactly what he found. ***"His master answered him, 'You wicked and***

slothful servant! You <u>knew</u> 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… cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Tragically, the servant's opinion of the master was *not* the actual truth in reality. This is not who the master *is*, this who the guy *thinks* the master is. And so, the master says to him, "Well, if that's what you think, then that is who I am to you." And that servant was cast out, away from the master.

But who was this master in *reality*? That story is told by the *master's* words and actions.

What is the master really like? The first word that comes to mind is "generous." He's going away, He entrusts talents to His servants. If you recall from a couple months ago, we looked at the parable of the unmerciful servant. That servant had been forgiven 10,000 talents, which I equated to a gazillion bajillion dollars. And that was because a talent is the amount of money a person would expect to earn from 6,000 days of labor, or about 20 years' salary. Now, *these* servants haven't been given *10,000* talents, but they *have* been entrusted with a *lot* of money. The first was given 100 years of salary, the second 40 years of salary, the last 20 years of salary. *Even* the wicked servant had been entrusted with a *lot* of money!

And yet, *all* that money, the master describes all of it as being only *little* to Him. ***"You have been faithful over a little,"*** is what He said to the first two servants. And so, we know that when He gives them these great, generous sums it's not because He's *greedy.* He entrusts to them *a little* of His great wealth, and yet even though it is just little to Him, He doles out *great* reward in return: ***"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 did you notice—the same reward is given to both. It wasn't about how much they did, it was about how much the master wanted to *give*. The master was generous.

So, which story, which depiction is more accurate? Is the master who the wicked servant *thinks* He is? Or is the master who He shows Himself to be? We all know the answer. And the point of the parable is that we all need to know who God *really* is. Not who we *imagine* God to be, but who God really is. Who has God revealed Himself to be?

The big picture is that the guy who gets cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth—he has a limited view of God. He is afraid of God. He has this Santa Clause theology in which he believes that God is just up there in heaven keeping track of who's naughty or nice, and that He's *trying* to catch you in a reason to condemn you. And so, we have to ask: where did he get that idea? Where on earth did he get that idea? It is not what we see in the parable!

And yet, isn't it true, that we *all* treat God the same way at times? There *are* times when we imagine God to be *hard* and unforgiving. There are times when we despair and doubt that God would be willing to forgive us for… whatever it is. There are times when we avoid prayer, because we're certain that God is just *so* disappointed in us. And when we do this, we have to ask: where did *we* get that idea? Where on earth did we get *that* idea?

This parable a wake-up call to us to listen closely to the Scriptures, to draw close to Jesus, because He

is going to reveal who God really is. Listen to your Savior's words and look at your Savior's actions, and ask yourself, "Is Jesus ***'a hard man, reaping where [He] did not sow, and gathering where [He] scattered no seed'***?" Do Jesus' words and actions indicate to us that He is one of whom to be *afraid*?

Is this Jesus? No way. *This* is Jesus: Betrayed by Judas. Mocked by crowds. Crowned by thorns. Denied by Peter. Sentenced to death by a weak-willed Roman governor. Brutalized by Roman muscle-men as they open up His back with their cruel whips. Hung by nails on a cross of rough wood. Abandoned by friends. Forsaken by God. And as the Son of God hangs there like a criminal, what does He say? ***"Father, forgive them."***

This is who Jesus is. *This* is the real Jesus. This is God who would rather die than live without the likes of us. *"For us men and for <u>our salvation</u> He came down from heaven."* (Nicene Creed) And He gave, He gave generously. He gave up His life. And He gave it for you. He gave it so that He could give *you* the wealth of the Kingdom of God. He gave it to you so that *you* could enter into and share in ***"the joy of your Master."*** And if you're wondering why on earth Jesus would give all of that for *you*, the answer is that *this* is who Jesus is. Jesus gives. He gives grace.

And Jesus gives you even more. He gives you "talents," which nowadays we understand in a different way than it's used in the parable. He gives you abilities. He gives you opportunities. He gives you time. He gives you relationships. And He gives all this to you because there are so many people out there who do not know who Jesus *really* is. They have come up in their imagination with an *idea* of who Jesus is, and they don't want anything at all to do with *that* idea of God.

But you know better. You know, because God has revealed it to you. So, invest your talents. Use them for the One who has entrusted them to you. And if you're at all worried that you don't know how to do it or that you might say the wrong thing, let me ask you this: if that servant with the one talent had invested it *because* he knew who his Master *really* was, and if he had then lost everything and came to his Master empty handed: "I tried, but I'm sorry—I failed!" What do you think the Master would have said to him? I *believe* it would have sounded much like this: ***"Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master."*** I believe that, because *that* is who our God is.

May this God of grace who forgives our failures and who desires to share with us *His* joy—while we wait for His return—may He open up more doors for us to invest the talents which He has lent us. And may He help us in this, in Jesus' saving name. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.