

Entrustment

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year A: Pentecost 25: Matthew 25:14-30

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ”

God has entrusted to us many things. Being acutely aware of this privilege holds promise and challenge. What we’ve been given is never only for ourselves, but rather for the sake of God’s Kingdom and others. Judgement is never God’s last or only word. It is always held within the person and life of Jesus the Christ.

God’s grace and mercy are ours. Yes, even after hearing this tough parable. God’s grace and mercy are ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A master getting ready to depart, entrusts his money with his slaves to make more money. What has been entrusted to us? Teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of educating young people. Doctors are entrusted with the care of our bodies. Parents are entrusted with their children's upbringing. When something or someone has been entrusted to us, it is sacred. It is a privilege. We do our utmost to make certain that which has been given to us is well cared for. God has entrusted us with everything.

When this sacred trust is violated, the hurt runs deep. The shock of the Enron scandal was overwhelming for all who lost their pensions; having entrusted it to the CEO's. It took years for Olympic gymnasts to find their voices after coaches violated them. Some can never overcome their particular damage or harm.

Because we take Bible study seriously, as it informs our present day lives, here is the background – the context – for this parable. Two chapters ago, Jesus denounces the scribes and the Pharisees. He says to the disciples, “Do whatever they teach you; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.” Then for 36 verses, Jesus says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites!”

The parables that follow are pointed at the very same scribes and Pharisees. Any parable with a master who goes away and slaves who await his return, would have been understood in Jesus' time to be God as the master and Israel as the slaves. In the parable of the talents, Jesus is speaking against the leaders of the church who have been given the Law of Moses. They've been given the temple of God, the sign of God's presence among them. Israel has been given God's promises and done nothing with them. They've buried it all, like the wicked slave, keeping it all to themselves.¹ Basically, the scribes and Pharisees have hidden that which God entrusted to their care.

When you and I are entrusted with something or someone it is a deep privilege from God. We must remember that what we've been given is never only for ourselves but rather for the sake of God's Kingdom and for others. Teachers realize their efforts will impact the broader community one day. Parents realize the weight of responsibility as children grow into responsible members of society. Doctors and coaches understand they represent at one level, their entire field of medicine or sport. Individuals who recognize their profound accountability can see above their own effort or time or expense and realize the end game for the whole.

Which is why I want to push back on the master's response to the "wicked" slave. This slave had integrity. He was honest. He spoke to his master saying, "I knew you were harsh, making money off of us instead of making it yourself. So I chose not to do anything with it. Take back what is yours."

According to the parable, this in-action was judged as wicked and lazy. Read another way, this in-action could be seen as resistance to social injustice. Making poor people labor for the rich. This slave didn't want to be part of a money making scheme. Even though he was afraid, he spoke to power and did what he thought was right. Which is why I don't us to hear this story as a divine exam; where some pass and some fail. That kind of Christianity has a danger to it where we miss the nuances of God's justice and God's mercy.

When God entrusts us to care for our time, gifts, relationships, communities, nations and all of creation...that sacred privilege holds promise and challenge.

Imagine that you are a nurse with deep joy serving in the neo-natal intensive care unit. You cherish walking alongside parents of newborns and cheering on tiny infants making their way into the world with tube feedings. But what to do when one notices that some hospital practices are hurting patients' families and patient care? Do we simply chalk it up to "that's just the way things are" and "it will never change", so why rock the boat? Or do we take that same passion for nursing and use our power to speak out for patient care?

Or take the challenge of water in this part of the country. When I landed in Pheonix, there were signs all over the airport, "Every drop counts." At the retreat center, signs in the restrooms read "We are mandated to have low flow toilets." Water is a gift entrusted to we, God's people. There is great promise in that gift! We have recreation on lake's waters. We play in swimming pools. Yet there is challenge as well. How do we conserve? How do we plan for increased population growth and their water needs? Entrustment brings promise and challenge.

But God's entrustment to us of all things is never only about individuals. It is always about God's Kingdom: the least, the last, the lost. Matthew's Jesus cares deeply for the blessedness of the poor, the grief-stricken, those who long for God's righteousness in all areas of life. Which is why St. Matthew always emphasizes consistency of our words and actions.

Which is also why, then, the parable ends the way it does. The master proclaims the “wicked slave” must be thrown into the outer darkness. Again, it’s tempting to hear this story as only a divine exam; where some pass and some fail. But we must hear the outcome of the story within the broader context of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

Because who is actually telling this story? Who is actually about to go into the darkness where even He will feel abandoned by God? Jesus the Messiah, our Savior. This one story is only part and parcel of a God who enacts justice within mercy. God who judges us, yes. Yet also sees you and I through Jesus’ sacrificial love...His body hanging on the cross. Judgement is never God’s last and only word. Jesus is God’s last Word.ⁱⁱ

God cares deeply about what we do or don’t do with what God has entrusted to us. God cares that we work at being excellent care givers and promises to give us the grace we need for each day, each challenge. The “trustworthy” slaves who made money on the master’s money were Jesus’ followers who were ready to do a new thing with God’s people. They are ready to let their light shine and not hide it under a bushel basket. They are ready to share a new story of God’s love.

Perhaps judgement in this parable really means becoming acutely aware of God and God’s presence.ⁱⁱⁱ For when we are aware of God’s presence in the children, in the sick, in the poor, in the needy, in the hungry and imprisoned, in the status quo of sin, in creation herself, then we will be empowered for loving care.

I invite you to turn to a neighbor and talk briefly about one or two situations or people that have been put in your care. How are you doing caring for them? Where do you see God in those situations? Amen.

ⁱ Matthew for Everyone. Part 2. N.T. Wright. Westminster. John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky. 2004. Pg. 138.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. Pg 139.

ⁱⁱⁱ Working Preacher. Karoline Lewis. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/entrustment>