

November 2, 2008
Pentecost 24

"What Have You Been Doing with Your Life"

MATTHEW 25:14-30

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' ²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²² "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' ²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²⁴ "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' ²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

What have you been doing with your life?" If you have ever attended a high school reunion, you know that question is often asked by other classmates? See that fellow over there, not the best student in the class, or the sharpest knife in the drawer, yet he sports a gold watch, expensive clothes, and came to the reunion in his new BMW convertible. He cannot wait for you to ask the question, "What have you been doing with your life?" so he can brag about the business he started that now employs hundreds of people.

That poor fellow standing over there by the punch bowl, he dreads someone asking him that question. He has been in and out of different jobs, struggling to pay off his credit card and the mortgage on his house. He dreads someone asking him "What have you been doing with your life?" There's the class valedictorian. Ask her the question and she will tell you how she has spent the last 20 years of her life raising her children, and how she hopes to get back in the job market to make use of her business degree.

Dear Christian, "What have you been doing with your life?" A better question might be "What has the Lord been doing with your life?" By God's amazing grace and mercy, you have been rescued from a horrible kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Jesus, your Lord and Savior. You are connected through faith to Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, and his love that is always the same, yesterday, today and forever. This King of Love has allowed you and me to serve him in his kingdom, 24/7, to give glory to his name, and even bear about in our bodies his death and his resurrection. The words of Paul "for me to live is Christ," could best summarize what your life is all about and what you have been doing with your life on this earth.

Today we want to listen to another parable of Jesus about the kingdom of heaven. He compares our lives to servants who are privileged to invest large sums of money for their master while he is on vacation. These large sums of money remind us of the huge opportunities we have every day to live our lives for Jesus in his kingdom that lasts forever.

Look at what the Lord has done for you

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his property to them." Jesus has spoken in the temple for the last time. He is ready to fulfill his mission as the Lamb of God by going to the cross for the sin of the world. He has crossed the Kidron Valley and gathered his disciples around him on the Mount of Olives to teach what it will be like when the world comes to an end. Interspersed in these lessons about the end of the world are these stories about the privilege of living in his kingdom and serving him with their lives.

This is an amazing story because of the amount of money involved. A wealthy man leaves for a trip and he entrusts his servants with huge sums of money while he is gone. One servant is given five talents, another two talents and another one talent with the assumption they are to invest the money while he is gone. A talent was comparable to a block of gold worth about 5,000 denarii, or 5000 working days, about half a million dollars in our money today, a block of gold the size of this brick.

What amazes us about this story is the confidence that this man had in his servants to take care of the money, invest it properly and bring a large amount of money back to him. Two of these servants came through with their investments. The man who was given five talents invested it and joyfully told his master, "Master, you entrusted me with five talents. See I have gained five more." And the man who was given two talents was able to show two more talents. Both of them heard the master joyfully proclaimed, "Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness."

What amazes us this morning is the confidence that Jesus has in you and me to serve him in his kingdom before he takes us home to the place he has prepared for us. It is so obvious from your every day life and mine that we have not earned this position of serving in the kingdom by our exemplary performances and our superlative faithfulness. Everything in the Bible tells us that we were born outside of God's kingdom, without hope, and without God in the world. Listen to how Ephesians describes our former condition of life. "As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sin, in which you used to live

when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest of, we were by nature objects of wrath." We were born with strange views on how we could earn a position of serving God and being accepted by him. These strange views might even include religious fanaticism such as strapping bombs to my body or throwing a virgin daughter into a volcano or offering human bodies as sacrifices to guarantee that the sun rises each day. It involves believing if I give my neighbor tomatoes from the garden that puts me into the position of serving God and being accepted by him.

It is only in the Holy Bible that we are shown the only way that our God could have such confidence in us that he would entrust the blessings of his kingdom into our lives. Listen to these words from the first chapter of the Revelation of John. "Jesus is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loved us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." We are privileged to serve the Lord as a kingdom and priests and servants only because of the blood of Jesus that was sacrificed for us, that declares us to be clean, and gives us the privilege of serving him. Together with the Apostle Paul we can say confidently, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord, whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's!"

Dear Christians, redeemed by Christ and servants in his kingdom, just think of the opportunities in life that have been entrusted to you. He gives this world in which you live and says, "Take care of these resources and use them wisely." He gives you money and asks you to make good decisions that allow you use your money to glorify the Lord and to help other people. He gives you time on this earth, precious time, in which you can interact with other people, pray for them, and let them see Jesus through you. You are the light the world and the salt of the earth. You bear about in your body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 4 the Apostle Paul says, "We have this treasure in jars of clay... We always carry about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ." This is far more precious than gold. In the love that we show each other we have the privilege of showing the love that God has for all people and how much he wants them to come out of the kingdom of darkness. Everything you do this week, everywhere you go, every word you speak, every dime you spend, every prayer you pray, is all part of this glorious opportunity to make investments for the King of kings and Lord of Lords who is micromanaging every facet of your life for his glory.

Look at how you can do better for the Lord

We need to talk about that one servant who was not faithful with what had been given to him. We are told that he took the money, the one talent, and buried it in the ground. He even excused what he did by saying, "Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have no scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See here it what belongs to you." This is not just the story of a man afraid to handle someone's money. This is the story of a servant who despises his master and refuses to accept the opportunities that were given him. This worthless servant is thrown into darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He is worse than the financial experts who rip off banks with huge salaries and then close the banks and causing financial ruin through out the world.

The calloused rejection of a golden opportunity reminds of what happened to the Jewish people at Jesus time. Jesus said of these people, "I would have gathered you together as hen gathers her children under her wings and you would not." They were given the greatest opportunity anyone could ever have and they turned their hearts against Jesus. In these last days the message of the gospel is going out into all the world and people are still turning away from the greatest investment opportunity that could ever be given them, life eternal in the kingdom of God. Jesus said "Unless a man is born again by water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

There is something about this man who buried his money into the ground that also bothers me personally and I am sure you have been thinking about it as well. Have there been times when I have been unfaithful in the way I have foolishly spent my money instead of using it for the Lord and other people? Have there been times when I have missed golden opportunities to pray for people or even for the welfare of our country during this financial crisis and this election year? And what about opportunities to pray for people I know and love who may be drifting away from Jesus or need to come to come into his kingdom and know his love? This past week I heard a sister give a glowing tribute to her brother as a very kind man who always had such strong morals. Lorenz Heinze was noted as a fine Christian man who did not bury his opportunities in the ground but faithfully served Jesus. Yet, Lorenz would be the first to acknowledge his failed opportunities and join us in confessing, "God be merciful to me a sinner. I deserve that place of darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of death."

Instead we have Jesus, we all have Jesus. He took the opportunity the Father gave him and invested himself in saving us. He took the shame of the cross, he lived the perfect life, and in Jesus perfect investment we can stand before God, even with our many missed opportunities and hear Jesus say, "Well, done, good and faithful servant." Well done!! Well done!! "What have you done with your life?" Even better we ask, "What has Jesus done with our lives!" It is all "A" pluses with Jesus. Amen.