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Pentecost 24

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Joy of the Lord, Forever and NOW”
Text: Matthew 25:14-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Joy and sadness. Joy for some, sadness for others. So it was in the parable we heard last week, with the five wise and joyous virgins, and the five foolish and sad virgins. So it is in the parable we heard today, and so it will be in the parable we will hear next week. All three about the Last Day, and what that Day, the Day of the Lord, will be like. Joy for some, sadness for others. And what makes all the difference, what *always* makes *all* the difference, is faith.

And so the Parable today. The Parable of the Talents, it's often called. And with such a title, no wonder we focus on the money. For that's what a Talent was - equivalent to about a year's wages.

But this parable is not about the money. With God, it's never about the money. Money is nothing to God. When **a poor widow** put two pennies into the Temple treasury - how many of the rich, who put in large sums, thought: two pennies, who cares? That won't make any difference at all! But it made all the difference in the world to Jesus. Or rather, it was the faith behind it that made it worth so much (Mark 12:41-44). Or how about **a rich young man** came up to Jesus one day, and Jesus told him to *sell all that you have and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me* (Mark 10:21). Without all that money, you'll be truly rich, Jesus was telling him! With all the riches that faith receives. Or how about when **the Pharisees and Herodians** asked Jesus whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not (Matthew 22:17)? Jesus couldn't care less! Give *Caesar what belongs to Caesar*. Give him his stuff. Far more important, far more significant, *was to give God the things that are God's*. Your fear, your love, and your trust - that is, *your faith*. And one more - when **those who collected the Temple tax** asked Peter whether Jesus paid His tax or not, Jesus has Peter pull a fish out of the sea, wherein he would find a coin to pay the tax for the both them (Matthew 17:24-27).

We need money. The problem is we often love money, make an idol out of it. Crave it, serve it, cherish it, cheat for it, horde it, and never seem to have enough no matter how much we have. Which really is an indication of its lordship in our lives, don't you think? If that's how we are towards it? And its why Jesus so often warns against the love of money and its dangers.

But if money is at or near the top of our totem poles, it is at the bottom of Jesus'. It is seriously hard to imagine anything Jesus cares *less* about! He simply doesn't care about it. *At all*. He cares about you. And He gives you what is far more important, far more valuable than money. For as Peter would later write, *you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ* (1 Peter 1:18-19). What money could not do for you, Christ did. And what money cannot do for you now, Christ does.

So it is with this parable today. For those so focused on money, this parable is all about the money. But for the Lord for whom money matters not, not one little bit, this parable is about **the joy of the master** - the joy he wants to give to his servants.

It's really a simple parable to understand . . . but maybe it is really in what is not said that we can learn something. The master **hands over** his property to his servants. Now, our English translation there says **entrusts**, which is the word we who so value money would use. You don't just give it away! But it is the word, for example, St. Paul uses when teaching the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper, when he says that what I received from the Lord, I also **handed over** to you (1 Cor 11:23). It is the same word used of Judas, who **hands** Jesus **over** - that is, betrays him (Matthew 26:16).

So the master *hands over* his property - and here's the silence: with no instructions, no conditions, no strings attached. It almost sounds like . . . *a gift*.

But either way, two of the servants use that money, but one does not. We don't find out why until the master returns - and then we hear **what the third servant thinks of his master**. That in his opinion, not only is he not a good *master*, he is not even a good *man* - he is an uncaring, greedy, wicked cheat. The first two said no such thing. In fact, they were completely unconcerned. They seem to be filled with joy, and in return receive more joy. ***They enter into the joy of the master*** - the welcome home feast for the master.

But what had happened in those long years - ***the long time*** - the master was away? How long had it been? Were there economic upturns and downturns? Had the servants, at one time, made more - ten or twenty talents more? But then lost some? And what did the master expect? Was this better than he thought they could do? Worse? **None of that's in there, for none of that matters**. It's not about the money. With Jesus, it's never about the money.

Again, our English translations, while possible, may be a little misleading here. It says the master returned ***to settle accounts*** with his servants. That goes well with the word *entrust*. But the word could also mean **to take it up** with them - to talk with them about it; find out how they are doing and how they used his gift.

For us, as Christians, either translation works. We know all we have is from God. Everything belongs to Him. He entrusts to us, gifts to us. That's not the crux here. What is is **what the servants thought of their master**. Or to put that theologically, or spiritually - what matters is **faith**.

The first two servants received the property, used the property, and returned to the master unconcerned and with joy. They didn't seem to think ill of their master, attribute to him any ulterior motives, nor worry about what he would say when he returned - *if they had done or been good enough for him*. They just seem happy to see their master, report to him what they had done, and go into his feast, into his joy, to rejoice with him *and he with them*. **That is the picture of faith**.

It is what the Last Day will be like for us! We who know our Lord, that He is generous and giving. And how do we know this? By the cross. For there, the **Father** didn't give you property or money - something He really cares nothing about! There He gave you, *gifted* to you, His only-begotten Son! His *beloved* Son. The most important thing to Him. And there the **Son** gave His flesh and blood for you, gave His life for you. No ulterior motive. No strings attached. Only to do good for you. To atone for your sin. To defeat your enemy. To conquer death. That you have the gift of eternal life with Him. That you enter into His joy - the wedding feast of heaven, to rejoice with your Lord *and he with you*. That's all God wants. Money? Who cares? That's passing away. But Jesus passes away and rises, so that we who pass away will too rise, and so never really pass away.

But that third servant . . . he really doesn't know his master at all. And think for a moment, how stinging and hurtful his words must have sounded to his master! For how would you feel, if someone you're trying to help, someone you're giving to and going out of your way for, says to you: I know who you really are! You hurt other people, take what's not yours, and swindle people out of their money! [Pause.] Wait, what? Really? [Sigh.]

Now, that *hurts* in this world and life, but on the Last Day, *it's deadly*. **Unbelief that doesn't worry if I am good enough for God, but thinks God's not good enough for me!** And then unbelief gets what it believes - a hard and vengeful God. A God not good enough for the unbeliever, a God unbelief does not want to be with now, is a God unbelief will be without forever. So instead of *entering into the joy of the master*, the third servant is *cast into the outer darkness*, where teeth are used not to feast, but *in weeping and gnashing*.

Joy and sadness. Joy for some, sadness for others. Jesus did *not* tell this parable to make you worry if you're good enough or not, if you're using His gifts or His property well enough, if you're generating enough return on His investment or not! Rather, this parable compliments the parable of the virgins we heard last week. That while we're waiting for the Bridegroom to return - waiting *with joy*, I might add! Because He is our Bridegroom

and we are His Bride, the Church, and weddings and wedding feasts are joyous events! While we are waiting for Bridegroom to return, we are not idle, but neither do we live in fear. We use, we invest, the gifts, the talents, He has given us now, **because we know Him! We know who He is!** We know that He has redeemed us, forgiven us, and loves us. We know He is not a hard, uncaring, unfaithful, and unreliable God, but one who gave His Son for us! And when He returns, **we will meet Him with joy**. For He's not going to say to you: *Is that all? Why didn't you do more? Where the rest of it?* Because any of your failures and shortcomings - and we all surely have those! - are wiped out by Jesus' blood. Instead you will hear: ***Well done, good and faithful servant.*** Words that really belong to Jesus, but which Jesus gifts to you.

So greedy for money, hoarding money, loving money? Not a child of God! And if you see that in yourself, if you do that, *repent*, receive the forgiveness you need, here for you in these words, water, and bread and wine, rejoice in that forgiveness, and then go out and rejoice in your gifts! Invest them in others. Give to others as you have been given to. *Don't wait until the Last Day to enter into the joy of your master!* Do so now by being like Him, giving like Him. For His joy is in you and giving to you. And now your joy can be the same, in others.

That in these gray and latter days, as Scripture calls them, while we are waiting for the master to return, while we are waiting for the Bridegroom to come, **you live in peace and joy!** The peace and joy of the Lord. The peace and joy of His forgiveness and life. For as St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians Christians: ***God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.***

Whether we are awake or asleep. Awake as joyful servants, or asleep as wise virgins. Either way, when the Bridegroom comes, we will ***enter into His eternal joy***. For His joy is not in money. It is that you are there. With Him. Forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.