



“Invest Wisely”

24th Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday and Sunday, November 18-19, 2017
All Services
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Matthew 25:14-30

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I struggle with this parable. I'm Not certain that I totally *understand* it. And if I **do** understand it, I'm not certain I like the conclusion. Let me walk us through it.

In the midst of all these parables we've been hearing - last week was the Ten Bridesmaids, next week we'll hear about the separating of the sheep from the goats - Jesus tells this parable about unnamed, apparently rather successful, businessman, who is going on a trip. Before he goes, he does this rather odd thing (or at least, it appears odd to our modern-day perceptions): he calls three of his employees, and entrusts each with a rather significant amount of money.

It doesn't really translate well into present day terms, but according to a footnote in one of my study Bibles, a "talent" is equivalent to 15 years of wages. Yes, I said "fifteen years." So, we're talking about *lots* of funds here. The boss/businessman calls these three employees, and gives each of them a different amount.

Let's do a quick bit of math. According to a September 2017 U.S. Census Bureau report, the 2016 "real median household income" was \$59,039. If we round those figures down just a bit, and use \$59,000, that means fifteen years times \$59,000 = \$885,000. Which is what employee #3 receives. Employee #2 get (\$59,000 times fifteen) times two, or \$1,170,000. Employee #1 receives (\$59,000 times fifteen) times five, or \$4,425,000.

As far as we can determine, they receive these funds for no other reason than safekeeping. They are **not** given any direction as to what, if anything, they are to do with these rather significant funds.

So, the boss goes away; no specific length of time, no specific location. He's gone. And then he returns. He wants an accounting of how they have invested his money. Because, *apparently*, that's what he *expected* them to do: invest it, without coming right out and saying that.

What is surprising to me, is that's exactly what the employees *have* done with their

employers' money: they **invested** it; they took risks; they used the funds to buy and sell. Well, two of the three do. The third one, the one who was given the least amount to work with, takes an **extremely** cautious approach to his boss's money: he buries his in the ground.

Regardless, the Boss is back, and wants an accounting. Employee #1 says,

Sir, look, you gave me five bars; through my financial dealings, I've doubled your funds.

The boss replies:

'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.'

Employee #2, same scenario, same response:

Sir, I've doubled your money.

'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.'

I need to stop right here. Have you ever asked someone, *anyone*, to watch over something financial for you? Sure, most of us probably have a financial advisor of some kind, or if nothing else, we have an IRA or 401K or even just a simple savings account. We **Expect** the funds we put in there to hopefully grow.

But say you're at the park, and you hand your wallet to a buddy to hold for you while you go out play a pick-up game of basketball. You do **Not** expect your friend to take your cash out of your wallet and go make some deals while you're bouncing the ball down the court. When I get done and go ask for my wallet back, I am **Not** wanting to hear:

oh, yeah, John, I took a twenty out of your wallet, went over to the Dollar Store, bought a bunch of sodas, came back here and sold them all for two bucks each. I doubled your money, so here's your twenty back, and the twenty I made selling.

My response is **Not** going to be

Hey, great job! You keep the \$40!

I *absolutely* relate to employee number 3. And even more so, once he gives us more background on his employer:

'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

You ask me to watch your car while you're gone on a two-month vacation, I might drive it around town a few times to make certain the battery stays charged, and the brakes don't rust; I'm *not* going to take it on a cross-country road trip.

But this cautious response from #3 *infuriates* the boss, who not only takes the money

from #3 & gives it to #1, but then tosses #3 out into the street - no pension, no parachute, no package of any kind.

So, what are we to do with this story?

Most of the commentaries I read say that the original hearers of this parable would have instinctively known that A) the Master, that is, the employer, was God; B) the servants were actually the believers, that is, the people of Israel; And C), the money invested with the servants was code for God's message.

If we bring this analogy to 21st Century North America, then, We - the believers, the servants - are given the message of the Gospel, that is, the Good News of Christ, and we are to go out and share that news. We are supposed to go tell others about God's grace, and love and strength and forgiveness. Which in *turn* means, when we **don't** tell others the gospel, that is, if we act like servant #3 and bury that treasure in the ground, that's the kind of thing that *really* ticks God off. That lack of action annoys God to the point of

As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

What *concerns* me the most about this parable is: am I doing that? Am I spreading that treasure, the Gospel message, around to those who need to hear it? Or to put it another way, how many people have I brought into a congregation? How many folks have I shared my faith with, especially to the point where they have made a life change, a faith commitment?

Now maybe you're sitting there thinking,

Brock, you do that practically every week, just standing up there, yapping away.

But I've got to disagree with that. I don't think all of you count in that regard. You already **know** the Good News. If you've been coming to church for more than a month and don't know it, then we've *both* got bigger problems going on.

No, let me ask this incredibly uncomfortable question: How many people are active in **this** congregation because of you? How many new members have you brought in?

Let's make it a little easier, and take it outside of Trinity: how many people, other than those to whom you are biologically related, are active in their Christian faith because of you?

That's the point of this parable. Not money, not wealth not personal gain. Not even how well do you follow vague directions? No. I think the point is, what have **you** done, what have **I** done, to increase the body of Christ, and bring others into the fold?

How have you invested the faith you have been given?

That is the question each of us are asked. And sisters and brothers, on that question, I

truly think, **All** of us are wanting.

Amen.

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