

Pentecost 25, Proper 28 B, November 16, 2008
Church of the Reformation—Lutheran, Affton, MO
Matthew 25:14—30

God's Economy

Those were some talented investors, those first two servants in today's Gospel! One hundred percent profit! That's quite something. Admittedly, it didn't all happen overnight—the owner was gone for a long time. Ten percent per annum over ten years adds up to 100%; so it is possible. Who couldn't use a broker or investment counselor like these two—especially in our economy?

The two talented investors made money for their master—twice as much as he gave them. The third investor, or servant, is the fearful one. He reaps nothing, because he sows nothing. Then again, if your competition is doing 100% better than you are, maybe it is time to dig a hole.

Caution and security are the watch-words when money markets fluctuate so much and times are so uncertain. Thus the third servant kept his master's money safe. At least, he didn't lose any of it.

Let's backup for just a minute. What these three servants of this master had was a *fiduciary relationship*, a relationship founded on trust, a confidence placed by one person in the integrity and fidelity of another. A fiduciary has a duty to act primarily for his client's benefit, especially in financial matters. As you have probably guessed, the word *fiduciary* stems from the Latin *fides*, or faith. And here we come to the key to this entire parable.

The element of trust, of faith, has already been present in this story. The master is **“going on a journey, [thus he]entrusts to [his servants his] property.”** Some would call the master foolish or short-sighted. Nevertheless, he has placed his trust in these servants. The five, two, one of gift distribution really is nothing more than a realization of what each employee is capable. God is really not into calculation, equalization, or quantification—He just keeps on giving. The five, two, one of the gifts become a problem only in our own eyes, as we look with envy at what others have received.

So the master, as a “client” of these fiduciaries, can expect them to work for his interests, utilizing the gifts he has given them. The first two servants risked all as they put their talents to use. They acted in faith, trusting their master and his trust in them. Safety and caution may have been part of their vocabulary, but these servants also knew that the gifts they were given were to be put to use. Thus they invested it in markets, in businesses, in people. When the master returns, they hear a surprising blessing on their work: **“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.”** Faithful is the key word for a fiduciary, not safety and caution.

Faith is not in the vocabulary of the third servant. He thinks he knows all there is to know about his master. Calling his master a “hard man,” the servant views his master through the distortion brought by his own hardness of heart and selfishness. The servant can’t see his master for who he really is, a generous, trusting, and wise man. The servant is no different than of humanity which is suspicious, ungrateful, fearful, rebellious, unwilling to make us of the many gifts God gives.

We should note that this third servant *did* earn something with his own talent. He earned the condemnation of his master, the one he had call “a hard man.” The master calls this servant “**wicked and slothful,**” someone who is neither safe nor prudent. This servant had no faith in his master and so received hard and harsh judgment from the hard master.

How often haven't we misused the gifts that God has given us? How often have we neglected to use God's gifts in ways that bring honor and glory to God alone? How often have we been afraid to risk our lives, our comforts, our routines, our security for lives that proclaim the love of God in Christ Jesus to our families, our neighbors, and to others throughout the world? We know all too well what our puny lives and efforts have earned—death and darkness.

“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). You see there is another servant in this story, the servant who is telling the story, the Suffering Servant who “**took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us turned to his own way, but the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all**” (Isaiah 53:4). This Suffering Servant, our Lord Christ, entered the outer darkness of our sin and death. With His death on the cross He took upon Himself the wrath we deserved to suffer, so that, though undeserving, we might share in His joy, His happiness, His life. You see, Christ Jesus is the security we need; for even if we lose everything we are safe in God's faithfulness, for we have everything we need in Christ.

So this parable is more than just about money. It really does fit on this second last Sunday of the church year, for this end time. It's a two-edged story: First: God might arrive at any moment, so we are to be ready. The other edge of this is this: God might delay His return, and we must resist all temptation to take it easy.

I was reminded of this when I received this week a CaringBridge email from my friend, Mark Meschke. A former teacher at Lutheran High School North and Metro East Lutheran High School, Mark has suffered for the past couple of years with cancer and tumors on his back. Here is what he says:

I'm sorry if I misled some of you about the imminence of my death. While it could come tomorrow or next week, we and the doctors are thinking more in the several to many months range. The priorities are infection, especially pneumonia, then the body tumors, especially if they spread, then the brain tumors. Right now there is no immediate threat. Although tired I feel very good. I can do most of the mild things I could before; it just takes more time and caution. Our support group is great. Thanks for being part of that! God's first article gifts are overwhelming.

Mark is living his life as a fiduciary, one whose trust is in Christ. Mark is living in God's economy, living under God's grace and mercy. We also live as fiduciaries, ones whose trust is in Christ. We live in His service, not under the Law that demands a return of our own making, but we live under the Gospel that gives us an abundant share of what Christ Himself has earned for us. He sets us free to risk all in joyful, confident faith. As forgiven and redeemed servants, we are motivated not by love of rewards, but by the love our Master, our Lord Christ.

Perhaps the words of Richard Baxter (*LSB* 757) say it best:

**Lord, it belongs not to my care whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share, and this Thy grace must give.**

**If life be long, I will be glad that I may long obey;
If short, yet why should I be sad to soar to endless day?**

**Christ leads me through no darker rooms than He went through before;
He that unto God's kingdom comes must enter by this door.**

**Come, Lord, when grace has made me meet thy blessed face to see;
For if Thy work on earth be sweet, what will Thy glory be!**

**Then shall I end my sad complaints and weary, sinful days
And join with the triumphant saints who sing My Savior's praise.**

**My knowledge of that life is small, the eye of faith is dim;
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all, and I shall be with Him.**

Henry V. Gerike