

Good and Faithful Servant

Matthew 25:14-30

May 22, 2016

Well, what a wonderful morning. It is so good to all be together, worshiping the Lord. And I am looking forward to after worship. Am I right? Some good Methodist food.

Of course, today is first and foremost about worshiping God, the Creator and Preserver of Life, the Author of our salvation, the Giver of all grace. Every day, our lives should be live in praise, worship, and obedience to Him.

But today is also a day that doesn't come around very often. Today, we pause to recognize Marjorie Anslow, to praise God for her, to celebrate with her, to honor her, to thank her, for her 30 years of service to Christ and His church.

She doesn't want us to do this; in fact, she mad at me right now. A few weeks ago, she told me how much she appreciated something I said about Martha, the sister of Lazarus and Mary, who was the faithful behind the scenes servant to Jesus and those around her. And that is Marj. She is a Martha. She doesn't need or want the spotlight.

But today Marj, you are in the spotlight. And how is that? It is the light that you have given us shining back to you.

You know, there were many Scriptures I could have picked for this day to honor Marj. But none more appropriate than the story Jesus told of the servants in Matthew 25:14-30. Let me read that for you:

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 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. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 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.' "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!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "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!' "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. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "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? 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. "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 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. And

*throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*¹

I don't have time to share everything that is in this passage, but let me share with you a few things that stick out to me.

First, this parable is told in the context of a greater teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God and His second coming.

Look at verse 1 of chapter 5:

*"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like..."*²

Then verse 31 reads:

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory..."*³

This parable is in the midst of teaching concerning the personal return of our Lord. We cannot forget that context as we consider what Jesus is saying here.

Second, the Master gave the servants something that was very valuable.

The master gave one servant 5 talents, another 2 talents, and a third 1 talent.

The Greek word for "talent" has the sense of "weight." Other translations try to convey that by translating talents to bags of money, silver or gold.

But what is a talent?

In Jesus' time, a drachma was the equivalent of a day's wages. It is thought that the talent referred to here was the equivalent to about 3,300 drachmas, or 3,300 day's wages.⁴ To put it in terms we might understand, based on the medium household income here in Germantown, each talent would be worth almost \$600,000. So the master handed out 5 talents to the first servant, or \$3 million; to the second, he gave 2 talents, or \$1.8 million; and to the third, he gave \$600,000, nothing to sneeze at. Each servant then had considerable capital to work with.

So what is Jesus saying in this parable? What do the talents represent?

We use the word "talent" today to refer to the special ability or aptitude one may have, as, for example, a talent for music or art. So in a sense, we can see this parable to understand that God has given us talents, and we are not to waste them.

But that is putting today's interpretation of talent into Jesus' time. What He meant was money. So what is so valuable to Jesus as the Master of this story? Is it money? Some prosperity preachers might take this passage and say, "God has given you some money; you need to go out there and do everything you can to give Him more money; and of course, give it to me to give to the Lord."

Now, does that sound like God? If He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, does He need us to take what He has given us and double it? No, I don't think so.

So what is so valuable to God that He gives to us to work with? My friends, I think it is people. I think it is the people that God the master has entrusted to us, something of great value – those who are part of God's bank account (believers) and those yet to be won and brought to the Master. I think the talents the Master gives are the people we are responsible for to bring back to the Master.

We are talking discipleship and evangelism. The servants are given things of great value, people, to bring back to the Master.

¹ Matthew 25:14-30 (NIV)

² Matthew 25:1a (NIV)

³ Matthew 25:31 (NIV)

⁴ R.C. McQuilkin. "Our Lord's Parables." Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980, p. 115

God gave Marjorie the people of this church to nurture and care for. It's not easy to be the secretary of a church. Sometimes, you are stuck in the middle, serving the church, its pastor and leaders, and at the same time worshiping and living among the congregation. The pastor does something or says something that upsets folks, and you know the secretary is going to hear it and be put in the unenviable position of supporting the pastor while listening to the parishioner. It can be very difficult to be in the position to know that you are not going to make everyone happy all the time, that there will be times that you will anger someone in the church, either by commission or omission.

Yet with Marj, so many of us have been blessed by her spirit and her love. She has walked the fine middle line, and done so with grace, understanding, and compassion. And she has done so many things to help disciple the people of this church, whether it is ordering curriculum or helping a Sunday School teacher or countless other things.

But she has done more than disciple and nurture the people of this church. Those of you in United Methodist Women know Marjorie's passion for projects of outreach. She cares deeply that the lost be found, that those entrusted to her by her Master be brought to Jesus. And she has done that. She has taken what God has given her, according to her ability, and returned double back to her Master.

Third, the Master returns after being gone for a long time.

The Master in the parable gives these tremendous amounts of money to his servants and then leaves on a journey, and none of the servants knows when he will come back. In fact, the text says:

*"After a long time the master of those servants returned..."*⁵

The servants had no idea the master's goings or how long he would be gone.

That sounds like pastors, doesn't Marj? They leave and you never know when they will come back, right?

And Marj has had a lot of them. In her 30 years, she has worked with 8 pastors. If you take Carla and my tenure out of the mix, that's 6 pastors in 16 years – a new pastor every 2 2/3 years. Wow. You just never knew what kind of pastor you would get.

Now, you folks know what it's like when you find out you are going to get a new pastor? What will he or she be like? Will they be pleasant or annoying, organized or a mess, will they visit you or not, make you sleep in church or not. You've had to deal with all the uncertainty, but Marj has had to work with all these characters, especially the weird one that brings his dog to church. There's a reason why Marj is retiring now!

She has been that person doing her ministry in the church office since 1986, 30 years ago. It was back in the day of typewriters and mimeograph machines. Remember typing those masters? One mistake, and you had to start all over. And if you had a big run, you could get a little high and light headed from the fumes. Then came the correcting typewriter, and eventually the word processor. Finally, though it was very expensive, the church bought its first computer, and Marj had to learn a new technology to do her job.

One of her responsibilities was the church bulletin. 30 years of bulletins. Figure 52 bulletins, plus 3-5 extra bulletins during a given year, and Marj has prepared 1,680 bulletins. All perfect in every way, in every detail, right Marj? Well, maybe not.

Sometimes, a blooper finds its way into the bulletin, like these:

⁵ Matthew 25:19 (NIV)

- The low Self-Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7:00. Please use the back door.
- The outreach committee has enlisted 25 visitors to make calls on people who are not afflicted with any church.
- Don't let worry kill you off – let the church help.
- Ushers will eat latecomers.
- Pastor is on vacation. Massages can be given to the church secretary.
- Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of the pastor's sermons.
- Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.
- Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, will be speaking tonight. Come hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.
- Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.
- A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.
- Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.
- The third verse of Blessed Assurance will be sung without musical accomplishment.
- Potluck supper: prayer and meditation to follow.

Now, those bloopers never made it into any of Marj's bulletins, for sure, but I digress.

What was I talking about? Oh yes, the Master being gone. The master stayed away a long time. Perhaps some of the servants wondered if he would ever come back. But he did return, and then came the time of reckoning.

My friends, Jesus is coming back – we know this is true. And while He is gone, He has divided a great responsibility among his servants according to their abilities. No one received more or less than he or she could handle. If he failed in his assignment, his excuse could not be that he was overwhelmed. Failure would indicate only laziness or hatred toward the master.

We are responsible to use well what God has given us, and he expects us to invest them wisely until he returns. The parable describes the consequences of two attitudes toward Christ's return. The person who diligently prepares for it by investing his or her time and talents to serve God will be rewarded. The person who has no heart for the work of the Kingdom will be punished. God rewards faithfulness.⁶

This parable teaches us to begin all Christian service with the knowledge that we are serving Him who has given all for us and that we can never repay Him or do enough to show our gratitude.⁷

The one servant did nothing for the kingdom of God. He is the opposite of the other servants. They were good and faithful; he was wicked and lazy.

The work the Lord has for us is very important, and while He is away, we are to "immediately" get to it. He has entrusted so much to us; we don't want to let Him down, for He is coming back. And when He does, we all want to hear from our Master those wonderful words that we are saying to Marj today: well done, good and faithful servant.

⁶ Life Application Study Bible, Matthew 25:29-30

⁷ R.C. McQuilkin. "Our Lord's Parables." Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1980, p. 113

Folks, God has given you a tremendous gift/responsibility. What are you going to do about it?