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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Pulpit Exchange at Tabernacle Baptist Church

Sisters and brothers in Christ, will you please pray with me?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

So, Friends, before I launch into this sermon...

Before we tackle this text from Matthew, chapter 25...

I want to take a brief moment to thank all of you for having me.

It is a blessing for me, and for the members from our church...

It is a blessing for us to be with you this day.

Reverend Brown and myself, along with those who have been attending the Racial Justice Forum these many weeks—both from the Tabernacle Baptist community and from Our Saviour Lutheran...

We have been talking about this Pulpit Exchange for awhile.

We have been looking forward to this occasion for quite some time.

PAUSE

The hope is that this experience—this pulpit exchange—will be an opportunity for our congregations to get to know one another better.

The hope is that this will be only a first step whereby we can learn from one another, whereby we can grow in the Lord's grace together, whereby we may even come to serve the gospel in the world together.

The hope is that by the power of God's Spirit more blessings will emerge from the conversations we have been having already, that more opportunities to partner

will follow on the heels of today, that even more gifts from God will take place from this sharing of hospitality today.

We have been talking about ways in which we can come together as two congregations to develop a deeper rapport with each other, to develop deeper relationship with each other.

Of course, with the ongoing pandemic, that makes that a little more challenging.

But today is a start. And so again, I want thank you for welcoming me, and welcoming those members from Our Saviour who are with me today.

Earlier this morning, we were blessed to have Reverend Brown and a number of folks from your congregation at Our Saviour Lutheran.

And thank you then for returning the favor that we can now be here with you.

PAUSE

With that said then, I want to turn our attention to Matthew 25.

I want us to turn our attention and notice something specific that is going on right at the beginning of this text which we just heard..

Here we have Jesus describing a man who is going on a journey....

The parable begins, "For it is as if a man, going on a journey..."

PAUSE

Did we catch that? Did we see that?

The text says, "It is like a man who is going on a journey..."

Ah, there it is again...but we might have missed it.

So, let me say it again, "A man is going away on some kind of journey... and his 'absence' is compared to something else."

Ahh, I still don't think we are catching it, so let me break it down for us.

A man goes away...goes on hiatus from his daily occupation ...takes a break from his business dealings...calls timeout, takes a breather, stops what he's doing, and goes away.

Did we see that?

And the text says that this event—this man going away on a journey—is compared to something else.

For it is as if a man, going on a journey...

Some “thing” is being compared to a man who goes on a journey...

There is a comparison being drawn here.

There is an association being made.

Something is like something else.

PAUSE

We, of course, call this phenomenon in the Bible a “parable.”

Jesus speaks in parables, not Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippin kind of parables.

Pair of bulls.

(PAUSE) Sometimes I have to wait for folks to catch that one.

No, Jesus doesn’t speak in those kinds of parables.

Jesus speaks in parables in the sense one thing is cast up alongside something else.

It is a simile, a comparison, an association of two things that otherwise might not have any connection whatsoever.

Jesus is giving us a parable here.

For it is as if a man, going on a journey...

It is like a man going on a journey...

But what is it that is being compared here?

What is it that Jesus would have us observe so as to draw a comparison?

PAUSE

The answer, Friends, is actually in the preceding story in Matthew's Gospel, which is about the ten bridesmaids and the bridegroom.

We may remember that story was about these bridesmaids that were waiting for the bridegroom.

And these ten bridesmaids had lamps, but only some of the bridesmaids had had enough foresight to remember to bring extra oil for their lamps.

And some of the bridesmaids had not remembered to bring oil.

Some had oil and so were ready for when the bridegroom appeared, while the others were not.

In that story, which is another parable, another occasion where something is being compared to something else...

In that parable, of the bridesmaids who are waiting for the bridegroom, this scene is compared to the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, just as the bridesmaids were waiting for the bridegroom, so are we, sisters and brothers in Christ, waiting for the Son of Man.

So are we waiting for Christ's return...

We are living in what is called the in-between times.

We are living between the time when Christ had first walked this earth and then ascended back to heaven...

We are living between THAT time and the time when Christ will come again.

We are living in the in-between times.

This is our reality...

It is the reality of the bridesmaids who are awaiting the bridegroom.

And our reality is also that of those persons in our gospel today.

Again, the parable for today is about the man who goes on a journey...this also is about the in-between times.

The man who has gone on a journey is none other than Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is ascended back up into heaven, and we...

We have been entrusted with the Lord's property while the Lord is away.

PAUSE

Now, there are a couple of questions that immediately come to mind when we read this passage?

What, pray tell, is the "property" which has been entrusted to us?

Now, it is nice that the word "talent" appears the same both in Greek and in English, and so we might surmise that the "property" being spoken of here is the talents, the abilities, the skills, the powers we have.

For example, some have musical talent, or athletic talent, or academic talent, so on and so forth.

But the word "talent" in New Testament Greek is not translated in that way.

In Greek, a "talent" refers to a weight or unit of currency used by the ancient Romans and Greeks.

A talent was a huge sum of money, the approximate earnings of a day laborer for twenty years.

In comparison, a talent today would be worth...

\$7.25/hour is minimum wage, times 8, for an eight our work day, times 5, for an five day work week, times 52 for 52 weeks in a year, time 20 years, gives us a total of \$301,600, which is probably a conservative number.

Some estimate that a talent of gold weighed some 33kg, or about 72 pounds, and given the price of gold today, it would be worth over two million dollars.

So "talent" in contemporary usage is different from the usage of "talent" way back in Jesus' day.

In short, the "property" being spoken of in our Gospel reading is something of great value.

So there is this question about what "property" we are to take care of in these in-between times, while the Lord is away.

And then there is the question about how we are to care for the property entrusted to us.

Notice that the man never says to those entrusted with his property how they are to care for the property.

But the assumption is that to care for the property is to increase the property.

That is after all what the one who is given five talents and the one who is given two talents immediately proceed to do, that is to increase the wealth of the man.

And I have stop here and say, “This is where, for me, there is some problem with this parable.”

For this parable depicts the slaves as instruments of the master, for the master’s own benefit, such that the slaves exist only for the master, in this case to increase the wealth of the master.

The parable depicts the slaves in the story as being used by the master.

And we must remember that it is never the intention of God nor of our Lord Jesus Christ, such that any person would lord it over another person.

Yes, we need to note that no analogy, no parable is ever perfect.

Even when our Lord uses a parable or analogy, at some point it breaks down.

And for me, this parable breaks down on this point—that the slaves are depicted as instruments of the master, for the master’s own gain.

And I should also note that the reason I chose to preach on this parable for today, is for no other reason than it appears in what is called the Revised Common Lectionary for today.

In effect, it is the designated lesson for Lutheran churches today.

PAUSE

That aside, the point being is that we are to increase the “property,” this something of enormous value...we are to increase the “property” entrusted to us.

So again, we are left with those two questions...

What is the property we Christians are to take care of in the in-between times?

And how do we care for that “property”?

PAUSE

And if I may go out on a limb here, I would suggest that the property of which Jesus speaks is none other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Is there, indeed, anything of greater value in this life?

Certainly the gospel exceeds the value of one talent, two talents, even five talents.

The gospel, that good news that Christ Jesus has died and has been raised, such that we are forgiven our sins, such we have the promise of new life, such that we have a most certain hope...

There is nothing that even remotely comes near in value of the gospel, the gift of God's Son Jesus Christ.

And, our task, as people of God, is to multiply that good news.

We are to make it known.

Like those entrusted with talents in the gospel passage, we are to be diligent about doing what we can to multiply the grace of God in the world.

That is our task, that is what we are to be doing in these in-between times.

That is what we are to be doing while we await the return of the Lord, from his metaphorical journey.

Indeed, how will the Lord find us when returns?

Will we have increased the grace of God in the world, or will we have buried in the ground what has been entrusted to us?

We see the morale of this parable, don't we?

We are not to be afraid to take chances, we are not to bury the grace of God.

We are to take risks on behalf of the Gospel. We are to boldly proclaim the gospel.

I always liken it to a base runner in the game of baseball.

You can't steal second if you never leave first base.

But there is a risk, when you take that lead off first...

There is a chance when you break for second base...

There is the possibility that you may make an out...

But the Good News is even when we falter, Christ is there to redeem us, and empower us for new endeavors.

But we are called to take risks for the gospel.

That is after all why we are doing what we doing today.

That is why Reverend Brown and I, and members of our two congregations wanted to hold this pulpit exchange.

This is a moment for us to say that the gospel of Jesus Christ is too valuable for us to cling it within our own buildings, in our own congregations.

Not that our individual congregations aren't already serving the Gospel out in the world in many and various ways.

But there may be even more we can do together to extend the grace of God further.

The great thing about the gospel is that it is one of those things that actually increases in value when we give it away.

PAUSE

Again, think of it in regards to the one in our gospel reading who was given the one talent and buried it.

What might have happened if the one who was given the five talents, or the one who was given the two talents, had gone over to that one with the one talent, and have said, "Hey, what can we do together to increase that which was given to both of us?"

Perhaps, the two, or even the three persons in the story could have pulled their resources and tripled the results, such that instead of an increase of 7 talents, there was an increase of say 25 talents.

That would really be something.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, this is what God has been saying to our two congregations, “Hey, what can you do together with that which I have entrusted to you?”

“For I am coming soon,” says the Lord, “And I am looking forward to seeing how the members of the Tabernacle Baptist Church, and the members of Our Saviour Lutheran, have increased the gospel in the world.”

Thanks be to God. Amen.