

Sermon for November 15, 2014

Today's Gospel reading is another parable. What's interesting about a parable is that its meaning can be different for each person who hears it and when they hear it. In Jesus' time a talent was a huge sum of money—twenty years worth of wages. So when Matthew's community heard this story they probably wondered at the generosity of the master who would give one slave the equivalent of one hundred year's worth of wages; another sixty year's worth of wages and the third the equivalent of twenty year's worth of wages! That's a lot of money, but it's meant to be because people realized just what you could do with that much money. Money was just as powerful then as it is now.

Over the years many have interpreted the word talents to mean our gifts and abilities; that we should not waste or hide them. In fact this is from where our modern word talent comes. So as we talked about in the children's sermon we are to take risks with the gifts that God has given us for the good of the kingdom whether they be money or talents such as singing, reading, cooking, getting along with kids or praying and the many other abilities God has given us.

My difficulty with this parable comes from my perception of the master. Growing up our ministers had always equated Jesus or God with the master in the parable. I could never get past the way that the third slave describes the master as one who was harsh, reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not scatter seed and the slave is fearful of him. That's just not my perception of God!

But this time as I read the parable the idea of perception kept coming up. The first two slaves don't seem to have the same perception of the master that the last one does. Even though they don't say so, I think we can tell by their actions that their perception is totally different about the master. They are given even larger amounts of money than the third slave and yet they are unafraid to go out and trade to make more. Why? Could it be that their perception of the master is one of generosity, trust and forgiveness?

If we see this parable as one that urges Matthew's community and us to be watchful, to have an active faith that takes risks for the sake of the Gospel as we wait for Jesus' promised return; could our lack of action be more than just the fact that we feel our talents aren't good enough, but come from our perception of God as being one who is stern and prone to punishment? Could our perception of God be keeping us from taking risks for the sake of the Gospel?

We'll take a few moments now and think about God and remember what pictures and feelings come to mind. What did you picture? Did you see a stern, violent, judgmental God? Or did you see a gracious, loving, patient God? Does your perception of God match the one that has been given to us in the life of Jesus Christ?

Martin Luther wrote that the truths we know about God are what we see in the life of Christ. Christ who voluntarily left his place of power beside the Father to be born human and in a stable at that! Christ who lived as one of us; experiencing hunger, fatigue, temptation, pain and even a horrible death on the cross. Matthew puts this parable just days before Jesus will be arrested, tortured and put to

death on the cross. He does this not as a substitute to be punished in our place, but to show us just how far God will go to show God's love for us and for the world.

Jesus spent his life taking risks proclaiming the Gospel. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, gave forgiveness, and welcomed all into God's loving embrace. And for taking that risk he was crucified. That's how much God wants us to know that we are loved and precious in God's sight. But in case we missed that message, God raised Jesus on the third day into new life so that we can know that life is stronger than death and that love is more powerful than hate.

How we picture God matters. Will we bury the good news of God's grace and mercy out of fear because we picture a stern and judgmental God who will punish us if we get it wrong? Or will we be willing to take risks to tell about the numerous gifts and moments of grace that we have experienced all around us because we picture a merciful and forgiving God? Let us go out and sin boldly as Martin Luther proclaimed trusting in God's graciousness and mercy when we get it wrong, but also realizing the joy of the master when we get it right!

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