

“God’s Good Gifts”

Matthew 15:14-30

The Bible is full of viewpoints and moralities that seem completely upside down from what we normally see in the world around us. The following are some examples. The words of Jesus.

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” (Matthew 20:16)

This world encourages us to be on the top and the first but not to be the last, which is looked upon as being a loser.

“The greatest among you must be a servant.” (Mt. 23:11)

This world adores to be served by many but not to serve.

“... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Mt. 5:44-45) *“Love your neighbors and hate your enemies”* seems to be more familiar to us.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5:10) Then we might say to ourselves, “I’d rather not have the kingdom of heaven.”

“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.” (Luke 6:21) We do not want to hunger for anything, right? We’d rather be satisfied and feel full.

In today’s Gospel lesson, which is a parable, we hear something totally different from what we would expect to hear in today’s world.

A parable is not an allegory, in which each small part has its own meaning. A parable has a point to convey to us.

A wealthy master was going on a long trip and called his three servants. He entrusted his valuable possessions to them. He gave five talents to one, two to the second and one to the last one, according to the ability of each servant. Without any specific instruction, he left for a long journey.

A talent was worthy roughly 6,000 denarii. A denarius was a wage for a day laborer for a day. So if we say, in today’s money, \$100 is a wage for a day laborer, one talent

is worth \$600,000. That's a good deal of money, isn't it? Two talents would be \$1,200,000. Five talents would be \$3,000,000.

The one who received 5 talents put the money to use doing business and earned 5 more talents. The one who received 2 talents did the same and earned 2 more talents. The one who received 1 talent went out and buried it in the ground.

The master returned and called for his servants to see what had happened to the eight talents he had entrusted to them. Each reported what he did. The master praised the first two. "Well done. You are a good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me."

The last one came forward to the master and said, "Master I know that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven't sown. You gather crops where you haven't spread seed. So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what's yours."

To this last one, the master replied. "You evil and lazy servant. You knew that I am a hard man. In that case you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins." It sounds like "use it or lose it," right?

As I mentioned before, a parable has a point to convey to its listeners. What's the point? What's the point of this parable? (No right or wrong. Each person may see a different point in this parable because God's word is alive.)

God gives us talents and we are to use them and not to bury or waste them.

--Valuable talents, gifts or whatever we may say as "our possessions," come from God. This is contrary to the world's view, isn't it? The world misses out on God. We do not much acknowledge the Giver but honor ourselves -- those who seem to possess valuable gifts of all kinds.

--"Talent" can mean anything valuable: material possessions, people's various abilities, time and health. The biblical view is that all good gifts come from God. *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."*(James 1:17)

God wants us not to bury but use what God has entrusted to us, which is valuable and good, however “scarce or little,” we may deem them. We may say, “Only one talent!” But a talent is valuable, isn’t it? If we use monetary illustration, it is worth \$600,000.

Does anyone recall a story of a candy lady in the Upper Room this past week? It was about a woman who greets everyone who comes to church on Sunday morning with a tin of assorted candies and a bag of sugar-free candies. She talks to each person with a smile and offers a candy. Everyone in the church loves to see her coming their way.

The point is that everyone is given something good to share, something good to offer to others and something good we can be thankful for. This woman is offering her joy, hospitality and kindness, which are gifts from God, to be used for God’s service.

So all good gifts come from ...?

We dare not bury them but use them for whom? (others, God, God’s glory)

This week we are going to celebrate Thanksgiving. Let’s count God’s blessings in our lives - all good gifts from God -- not only what we see with our eyes such as material gifts, but the gifts we don’t see, which are even more valuable such as love and friendship we receive and offer to our loved ones, friends and even to strangers.

Most of all, let’s give thanks for the greatest gift of all, whose birth we will celebrate in about a month, who said, “I’ll be with you till the end of age.”

As we move from stewardship season to Advent and Christmas, let’s take along our grateful hearts for all God’s wonderful gifts to us.

Amen.