

Matthew 25:14-30

When a dog buries a bone, he is saving it for later. The bone, for him, is something he desires. To bury it, therefore, is not to remove it from his life, but to preserve it in a place where he will return. This could hardly be said of the man in our text who buried his talent in the ground. He was not even as noble as a dog. He buried the talent he was given, not because he cherished it, but because he wanted to remove it away from his daily life.

The lesson here is not that we should be careful not to bury away and hide the talents, abilities, and opportunities God has given to us. For then this parable would teach that anyone can be saved if he simply makes the most of himself and does not merely waste his life away. But this parable has nothing to say about our hidden talents, and missed opportunities to improve our lot in life. This parable is about Christ. He is the talent given to the man who buried it away. He is the five talents and the two talents given to the two men who did not bury Christ in the ground but who were good and faithful servants. And He also has been given to each one of you and to me.

This parable is addressed, not to the unbelieving world, but to the church. The three men who received the talents, who received Christ, are representative of all people within the church. These are the baptized, for in Holy Baptism you and I and all others are given Christ--the talent of our parable.

Here in the last days of the Church Year, Scripture turns our attention to the last days of this world in which we live. The Judgment is coming and we need to be warned. No, not the unbelievers out there...we, the people of God in here need to be warned. If we feel smug and content because our names are written down on the roster of a Christian church; if we think, therefore, that we will sail with ease through the final Judgment because we are classified not as the unbelievers, but as the believers, then we need to take note of this parable. All three men in the parable were believers. All three were the baptized, those within the church. Two of them rejoiced upon the return of Christ, but one was cast into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If you and I are not honest with ourselves today as we listen to these words of our Lord; if we refuse to admit that the sin and unbelief which was at work in the third man lives also within us, then we are doing nothing less than shutting God's Spirit out of our heart. But friends, when God's Spirit does work within you--and He is here today to do this very thing--then He is truly preparing you for the return of Christ in Judgment, and you can rejoice that you, the baptized in Christ, are being led to repent of your sins and cling by faith to your Savior.

You, my fellow baptized Christians, are the men in our parable. God, who is your Master, has freely given to you the word of Christ, faith in Christ, salvation in Christ. This is not merely a loan extended to you. These holy things are yours. God gives Christ to you. God gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation in Jesus Christ. He will not ask for these back at the end of time. He gives Christ to you now so that He is yours always and forever. And you, like the first two men in our parable, are being good and faithful servants of God when you are faithful to what you have been given.

You are given Christ in baptism. And so you are being good and faithful servants when you regularly return to your baptism drowning the Old Man with all his lusts by daily contrition and repentance, so that the New Man arises daily to live within you. You are given Christ in the Holy Scriptures. And so you are being good and faithful servants as you gladly hear the Word, and as you then dig down into it by reading it, studying it, and meditating upon it. You are given Christ in the Holy Sacrament.

And so you are being good and faithful servants as you come forward often to receive Jesus' own flesh and blood for the remission of your sins and the strengthening of your faith.

The first two men in the parable were not holier than other people. They were not better than the third man in the parable. They were simply men who lived what they were given. They were given forgiveness, and so they lived in it. They forgave others because they were forgiven. They were given the hope and promise of eternal life, and so they lived with joy. They had problems. Their lives were not trouble-free. They had enemies. They dealt with the flu, and with colds, and broken bones. They took medicine for aches and pains. They struggled with stress, and heart attacks, and cancer. But they were good and faithful servants because although they dealt with all these problems, they lived their lives in what they were given. They were given Christ, and so amid all the perplexities of life, they lived their faith.

And so do you. I know you have problems. For ten years I've seen you age, just as you've seen me grow older. And our problems do not go away with time. One is replaced by another--sometimes by two or three. But your troubles are not with you forever...Christ is. You do not need to live with fear and doubt. Jesus is yours. Faith in Christ is yours. Salvation in Him is yours. God freely forgives you all your sins. And so listen to this...when Judgment Day comes, when you meet your Maker, when all people will stand before the Judgment seat of God, God will be the same to you then as He is now. He deals with you now through His Gospel; He will deal with you then with that same Gospel. Not a word of judgment was spoken to the two good and faithful servants in the parable. To them the master gave only good news..."Enter into the joy of your master." And so for you. Because of Christ who is yours. Because you live in Christ now, you will see Him with joy in the end. Because you are faithful to what God has given you now, He will call you His faithful servant then.

But there is a third man in the parable. Not one of you; not any one of you should live like that third man. And if you ever see me living like him, grab me and yank me back to Christ. If you see any of your dear friends or family living like him, speak to them now; speak to your Pastor and Elders now about them. Unlike the first two men, that man did not live with what he was given. He buried his talent in the ground. The priorities in his life were easily seen. Everything came before the hearing of the Word of Christ...parties, chores, hunting, relaxing, working, everything. He had buried Christ away and so he came to church only when it was convenient for him. He was not a man who read and studied the Word of God. He was acquainted with it, and for him that was good enough. He did not hunger for the Sacrament. He lived in fear, for he knew that he was doing wrong, yet he refused to admit that he was afraid of the Judgment. How his Pastor and Elders shed tears over him! He was always too busy to speak with them, but inside he was really afraid of what they would say. They desired to help him, to save him. But since he had buried Christ away in the ground, away from his daily life, he did not want to change his life. He made excuses and lived by them, not by Christ.

Now we need to admit that this third man lives in all of us. Every day of our life our sinful flesh wants to bury Christ somewhere...anywhere as long as He is away from what we want to do in life. The comfort for us is that God's Spirit, at work here today, leads you and me to confess this truth, to repent of our sinfulness, and to bury away from us, not Christ, but that old, wicked third man within us.

Led by the Spirit, we do not want to bury Christ. We want more and more of Him. And God keeps giving Him to you. When I was a pastor in Nebraska years ago, I had charge of a nearby church which had a vacancy. Two older ladies in the congregation were very unique. They were--at that time they were called mentally retarded. They lived in a group home and were brought to church on

Sundays. I met with them to make sure they knew what the Lord's Supper was about. I asked them what they were receiving in the Lord's Supper, and they both said without hesitating, "Jesus!" And oh, how they loved Jesus. At the Holy Supper they were like little children at Christmastime. They did not stare straight ahead toward the altar. Their heads, with eager smiles, were poking out over the rail waiting with excitement for me to come to them and give them Jesus.

These were ladies who, like the third man in the parable, were given only one talent, but they did not bury their talent in the ground. They never became church officers or sang in the choir. They never gave much to the offering plate. They never taught Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. They just had one talent--not a full understanding of the Scriptures, but they knew Jesus and they loved Him. And they never, ever buried Him away from their life. He was their life. One day these two precious ladies will hear from the mouth of their Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servants...enter into the joy of your Master."

Friend, you also will hear these words, not because of what you do with Jesus, but because of what He does with you. For all those times in your life when you lived like the third man, Jesus forgives you. He forgives you for burying Him away from your life. Now go and live with Him as the focus of your life. Live your faith. Live Christ. Do this not to become His good and faithful servant, but because this is who you are in Him. Amen.