

Matthew 25:14-30

You and I are the servants in this parable. I think, at least for me, that I schwaffle back and forth between them. One day I'm the servant who put his talents to work. The next day I'm the servant who buried his talent in the ground. My life is a rollercoaster. What about yours?

I don't want to hear from my Lord one day, "*You wicked servant!*" I want to hear from His mouth, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" Don't you? But I don't see myself as good and faithful. My cry is with the Psalmist, "*I see my sins against You, Lord!*" I say with Paul, "*The good I want to do, I don't do it; but the evil I don't want to do, that is what I do!*" If you're with me in this, how will we hear, on the Last Day, "*Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master!*" How, in other words, do we avoid the awful fate of the third servant?

He was given the same resources as the first two. Just not as much. But he had every opportunity to put his talent to work. Yet he buried it. This makes no sense. He could have taken his talent to the bank, and then it would have drawn some interest. It took more effort on his part to dig a hole in the ground and bury it than had he simply taken it to the bank.

Some days this is me. I expend more energy coming up with excuses for not doing the Lord's work than had I just done it to begin with. What about you? It takes more effort to avoid the Lord than to spend time with Him.

Adam and Eve discovered this in the Garden of Eden. They were the third servant. They were attempting to bury God away from themselves and never set their eyes upon Him ever again. But He acted in grace. He confronted them.

That's what He's doing today. He's confronting us by means of this parable. "Why have you been burying Me in a hole?" He asks. "Why have you buried My words away from your eyes and ears? My Sacrament away from your mouth? Why do you not live your faith, but instead act as if it was buried out of your sight?"

And I have no answer. Because it's true. That third servant lives in my heart. I don't want him to. I want to bury him. But I end up burying the Gospel; burying my calling to live my faith.

Those first two servants - how do we become more like them? They received their talents and at once, it says, they made more talents with them. They did not come up with excuses. They were not lazy. They were not afraid of their master. I hate these guys! They did everything right and nothing wrong. I'm so not like them it isn't even funny. But unless I become like them, I will not hear, "*Well done, good and faithful servant!*"

Good and faithful. But no one is good, the Bible says. And faithful? "*All we like sheep have gone astray.*" We're not faithful; we're faithless. The only good and faithful servant is Jesus. He did everything right and nothing wrong. He was never lazy, never fearful. He had perfect faith. He went at once and put His talents to work. And His Father in heaven said to Him, "*Well done, My beloved Son, good and faithful Servant!*" And Jesus entered into the joy of heaven.

So how do I change the third servant in me to be more like the first two; to be more like Christ? I don't. You don't. I cannot fix my sinful nature. I can only kill it. And that happens with repentance. Repentance is simply a return to my baptism. That's where God killed me. That's where He buried me, in those waters. And that's where the good and faithful servant came alive in me. That's where Christ began to live in my heart.

When Christ lives in you, there is a battle that takes place. That wicked, slothful servant in your heart tries to bury the good and faithful servant. But the good and faithful servant is working to bury him. Whose side are you on? We schwaffle, don't we? Back and forth.

Fighting a battle is tiring. We need strength, nourishment. This is why the Holy Supper is here for you. This is why Bible Study is available for you. You cannot fight the battle alone. The wicked, third servant in you has an endless supply of energy. But the good and faithful servant in you grows weak. Every Christian knows this. When we are away from the Word and the Sacrament; when it's buried away from us for a time, we are losing the battle. We become weak in faith. Our faith even dies for lack of nourishment.

Jesus comes to the rescue. The last thing He wants to say to you on Judgment Day is, "*You wicked servant!*" And so He, who is the only good and faithful servant, became the wicked servant in your place. That's who was hanging from a cross. The good and faithful servant. But He bore your sin and mine. He was charged with them. Jesus was, in every legal sense, accused and condemned for all the wickedness that we have done.

An exchange took place there at the cross. He became the wicked, slothful servant; you are declared the good and faithful servant. He was cast, as the worthless servant, into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth; God said to you, "*Enter into the joy of your master!*"

This is how you live as the good and faithful servant: this is who you are in Christ right now. Those who do not believe this will live with Christ buried away from their lives. To live apart from Jesus' words; to live apart from His body and blood in the Sacrament is to dig a hole and bury these in it. And that is wicked. And these will be cast into the outer darkness.

Let this not be you. Be who you are in Christ. Not the wicked, third servant. The good and faithful servant. Your wickedness - Jesus took it. You're forgiven of it; all of it. So don't go there. Leave your wickedness buried in a hole. Believe what Jesus says of you in your baptism: "You are My servant. My goodness and faithfulness I give to you." Believing this, you will live it. You will put your talent, or talents, to work. On the Last Day you will hear, "*Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master!*" Amen.