

Luke 19:11-27

The people of Thailand love their king. He sincerely cares for them. He does whatever he can to serve them, and they love him and honor him for it. No one in Thailand is opposed to their king ruling over them. This is not the normal way of kings and their subjects. Throughout history many kings were tyrants, and their people hated them for it. After Herod the Great died, his son Archelaus traveled to Rome to ask Caesar to appoint him as king over Judea and Samaria. You may recall that Herod the Great was a wicked king. In his quest to destroy the Baby Jesus, he murdered all the baby boys in Bethlehem. Archelaus was just like his father, and when he went to Rome, a number of Jews also went to Rome begging Caesar not to make Archelaus their king. Their plan failed, however. Archelaus reigned in his father's place.

If we were to compare Jesus to one of these kings, would we compare Him to the King of Thailand or to Herod Archelaus? Surely our answer would be the King of Thailand, for we love Jesus and want Him to reign as our King. It may be surprising, therefore, to read in our text that Jesus compares Himself to Herod Archelaus. Just as Archelaus was hated, so Jesus was also—so much so, that they put Him to death on a cross. Just as his subjects were afraid of Archelaus, so we read in the parable about the servant who did nothing with the money that was given to him because he was afraid of King Jesus. And just as Archelaus ruthlessly killed those who opposed him, so in the parable, Jesus will have His enemies killed before His eyes.

It should be no surprise to us that churches are not packed with members in late November like they are in late December. People prefer to hear about Jesus as a tiny, gentle Baby, and not so much as a tough, hard-nosed Ruler. People enjoy hearing about the first coming of Jesus; they do not enjoy being warned about His last coming in Judgment. And it has always been this way. Only Herod was out to kill Jesus when He was a baby, but by the time He had grown up, most of the people opposed Him and many wanted Him dead.

For us, Christmas will have to wait. These are the Last Sundays in the Church Year, and the hymns, the Scripture Readings, and the sermons are intended to awaken us from our spiritual slumber. Jesus is coming again—not as a baby, but as the King of Kings; our Ruler; the One to whom we must give an account. We are not just His subjects, we are His servants. And He has given His Word to us just as He gave the minas to His servants in the parable. From them, and from us, He expects an accounting. The parable does not dwell on the time before the end; it focuses on the end, when the King returns; when He gathers His servants and demands to know what they did with the money He gave them.

Today may not be your last day on earth, but we should live as though it were. A student who procrastinates; who puts off studying for the test until the last minute, will regret his laziness when the grades are handed out. We are that student when we adopt an attitude of spiritual laziness and neglect the hearing and reading of God's Word. We think we know enough to get a passing grade. But we forget what Jesus says (as our last newsletter points out): it's not what we know that counts—it's what Jesus knows. And He knows His sheep—those who are in the habit of following Him and hearing His Word.

“What have you done with the Word I gave you?” will be Jesus' final question according to this parable in Luke 19. He called in His servants and demanded that they give an account.

Two of them were commended for putting His money to use. The one said, “Your mina earned ten minas more.” The other said, “Your mina has earned five more.” These servants were not holy and innocent. They were sinners like all the rest of God’s servants. The reason they stood out; the reason they were commended and given a place in heaven is because they trusted that which was given to them. “Your mina earned ten more,” the one said. “Your mina earned five more,” said the other. They didn’t do the earning; the mina itself did.

And so it is with the Word of God. He has given His Word to you for you to read, to study, to hear, to live by, and to put your trust in. You are those two servants when you faithfully open your Bible at home; when you faithfully open your ears to His preaching and teaching; and when you faithfully open your mouth to His Word made Flesh for you. On the Last Day He will commend you, not for what you have done with His Word, but for what His Word has done for you and in you. You will be given a place in heaven because the Word of God has done its work in bringing you to Christ and keeping you in Christ.

One servant, however, was not commended. He did nothing with the mina which was given to him. And so he was assigned a place with the wicked. This servant was no more sinful than the other two. He may have lived as a law-abiding citizen. But he perished because he failed to trust what was given to him. If you and I do not make use of God’s Word, we are like this servant. If we bury God’s Word with the excuse of having no time for it, we are like this servant. God did not accept his excuse; neither will He accept ours. “You could have, at the very least,” He said, “put it in the bank.” And so with us. Even if we don’t bring ten of our friends to church with us; even if we don’t spend five hours a day in the Bible, at the very least we can “put it in the bank.” We can make Sunday morning the Lord’s Day for us. At the very least we can bring ourselves to the preaching and teaching of God’s pure Word.

“I was afraid,” that servant said, and so he did nothing—he was lazy. But really he did not trust what he had been given. If we, like that servant, don’t trust that God will do what He promises and work in us through His Word and Sacraments, and keep us in the Faith through that Word, we will not care much that God’s Word is preached and taught among us.

You don’t have to do great things for God for Him to commend you. The greatest thing you can do is to listen to the voice of your Shepherd. Through His Word at work, He will do great things for you and through you. To do nothing is the failure of that one servant. To make excuses is the failure of that servant who perished. Today you are at the “bank.” God is causing His Word to grow with interest for you. Will our congregation grow five-fold, or ten-fold? We don’t know what God has in mind. But we do know that His Word is living and powerful, and whether we grow in numbers or in our faith, or both, it is not because of us—it is God’s Word at work in us and through us.

This parable of Jesus may not make our “Top Ten List.” We may be uncomfortable seeing Jesus pictured as harsh and demanding, as One who shows no mercy. But friend, now—today, you have a compassionate God. He is not out to get you. He is not waiting for you to fail Him so He can destroy you. Right now He is giving to you. He holds nothing back. He gives you His Word and Sacrament, and through these He gives you His Holy Spirit, faith, hope, and eternal life—He gives you Christ. Today, November 18th, here

in Augusta, Missouri, you have a gracious God who is here to forgive you for disobeying Him; who is here to strengthen you in Christ your Savior. You do not need to be afraid of Him. Even if you have lived more like that one lazy servant than like the other two, you do not need to be afraid. Jesus died for you. He has taken away your sin. Your punishment fell upon Him. There is no penalty left—there is only grace and mercy for you.

Today, here at Christ Lutheran Church, Jesus is no Herod Archelaus. He is like the King of Thailand for you. He cares for you. He serves you. He does what is best for you. And that's why you love Him. That's why you serve His Church. That's why you desire to hear His Word. To you, on the Last Day, there will be no harsh words given. There will be no anger, no fear, no punishment. On that day, Jesus will commend you, not for what you have done in life, but because of what His Word has done for you—His Word of Grace, His Word of Forgiveness, His Word of Life—His Word which promises you, friend, that heaven is truly yours in Christ Jesus your Savior. Amen.