

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Imagine the scenario in our gospel this morning. A man going on a journey entrusts five talents to one of his slaves. These talents are not talents the way we think of talents, not gifted abilities of some kind, no these talents are currency, gold silver or copper, a lot of gold, silver or copper. Five talents would be the equivalent of 100 years of wages, one talent would cover 20 years of wages. No matter how you cut it, our gospel this morning is a story of extremely outrageous generosity. Giving even one talent is incredibly generous.

You know, as I think of it, this all sounds very much like our God. God is incredibly, outrageously, extremely generous with you and me, with our congregation. He does not hold tight to the purse strings, not miserly at all, giving material and financial wealth, a wealth of abilities, gifts and talents, talents as we think of them. He cares for us in every way, and he does so every day. He has freed us from enslavement to sin, he adds to our assets when we hear his Word, when we receive a sacrament.

God has adopted us, and we, as the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Thessalonians, are “children of the light and children of the day.” We are brothers and sisters together in Christ, adopted into God’s family, made righteous before God because of Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. And that is the most incredible gift of all, the generosity of our God who by the death of his own Son, saves us from sin, death and the power of the devil. We have been given an incomparable gift to have and to hold in that it is for each one of us. But the story does not end there. We are given the opportunity to invest this gift. We invest it in each other, in people who do not know this story, we invest it in our community of faith and outside our community of faith. We may not know what the payoff is, but we do know that God’s Word does not come back to him without having produced fruit. And the more we invest this gift, this saving gospel, the more our assets increase, they never diminish. We give, we receive even more in return. We live a life of discipleship, of stewardship, we serve and these come back to us and we are served.

The slave who received five talents traded with them, invested them and somehow gave back ten, the slave who received two returned four. I do not know how it happens, but I do know they did not bury their gifts in the ground, they did not sit on them and play it safe. They stepped out in faith so to speak, they put themselves at risk, think of it as leaving your comfort zone. Think of it as leaving the safety of pleading that you are a Lutheran and your faith is a private matter. In fact, if you want to bury something, bury that idea that your faith is private matter deep in the ground and never let it see the light of day again. You cannot plead that you are shy, or cautious, that you are an introvert, because those are simply excuses, they are simply another way of burying what you have been given and playing it safe.

I know it is not easy to be an evangelist, to share your faith, but it does not have to be hard either. It can simply happen, if you let it, as you go about the business of daily discipleship, of practicing stewardship, as you pray daily, read scripture,

engage in conversation, worship together, show hospitality, talk on the phone or write letters, give generously and serve others for Jesus' sake.

Now you as a congregation willingly, enthusiastically embraced the mission statement printed at the beginning of our announcements some years ago. And whether you were here or not that day doesn't matter, you're a member of this congregation and it is yours! You own it! Now how does that go again? "Through the active love and grace of God we as a body of Christ are called to invite, welcome, and care for all." As you live this, as you daily practice it, as you invite, welcome and care for all, you are investing the Good News of Jesus Christ. You are not playing it safe, you are not sitting on our assets, you are using the gifts you have received in terms of yourselves, and the possessions you consider your own.

You as a congregation are on an adventure, a trip, you have the desire to increase what God has given us. Okay, all you can do is plant the seeds, water and tend whatever comes your way, and trust that God will give the growth. If you think this church, this congregation is good for you, think of what it might be for others who do not have a church home. You cannot be centered on yourselves, God must be at the center of all you do. You know this intellectually, now know it in your hearts. You must put yourselves and your gifts, your talents if you will, at risk for the sake of Jesus. This is your vocation, you have been given grace through faith and you are in a covenant with God. You are baptized believers and as the baptized, you have a task. Remember what I said previously? Baptism is not just a rite, not just a formula, it is a commitment. Two thousand years ago Christians were at grave risk losing jobs, reputations, lives, facing persecution, execution. You are not at that kind of risk but even so you think you cannot put yourselves at risk and you sit quietly, but this you cannot do!

You are given the gift of discipleship so that you can invest the gospel, so you can invest the Good News. You are gifted to be life-givers, You are gifted to give yourselves and what you have, for the sake of Jesus. One of the slaves was passive, frightened, paralyzed inert and unwilling to act. You are not gifted to be inert. You are gifted to expose yourselves to rejection or even loss, and this okay. You inflict lute-fisk on one another, so why not your faith. We give all kinds of good (?) advice to others, even unasked-for advice, so why not our faith? The truth is you risk nothing when you step out in God's deep and penetrating love. You might think we do but the reality is you do not.

You do not force our faith on others, you do not judge whether they grow in faith, you do not decide on heaven or hell. That is God's business, but you do witness the faith within you. Providing shelter, telling and showing others how God loves them even as he acts through you. You have been given a wealth of love and the presence of the Holy Spirit, a gift that continually increases in each one of you. I pray that you will faithfully invest what you have been given, that your lives may be faithful and active in God's service, I pray that we may enter into the joy of our master. AMEN

