

November 15, 2020

As Christians we believe that the Kingdom of God has come upon us right here right now, in a very tangible way through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We also believe that the Kingdom of God is not yet, as we wait for Jesus to return. So, we live in this in-between time. It is a time when we are watchful and expectant, and also a time when we follow Jesus and live in love and grace.

Today our parable is about living in this in-between time. And the question I'd like to reflect with is this, "How does God's love change our lives, here and now?"

Our gospel reading is called the parable of the talents... A talent is a huge amount of money! One talent was worth more than 15 years' wages. In today's economy, with the minimum wage at 9.86 per hour, that would come out to over 3 hundred thousand. Five talents would be over a million and a half! So, we're not talking about little sums of money.

The parable says that the landowner gave different amounts to the slaves according to their ability. In other words, there must have been some kind of relationship. He knew he could trust some, more than others.

Those he entrusted with more, returned more... And the one he entrusted with the least, returned only the original talent. The relationship between these slaves and the master is interesting to me. The one who was given five talents, went out immediately and started trading. Even though he had the most to risk, he was also the most comfortable in the master's confidence and he got right to work.

The slave entrusted with the least was afraid of the master. He says, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.” Fear leads to distrust and suspicion; which leads to turning in on ourselves. Rather than looking outward for possibilities, we curl in on ourselves in fear.

It’s a good contrast, for the slaves entrusted with the most, they ended up entering into the joy of the master, while the slave who lived in fear and distrust ended up in weeping and gnashing of teeth. Essentially, he was given into what he feared all along.

One of my favorite Old Testament professors wrote a book, and the first sentence reads, “It’s not enough to say you believe in God, finally, you must tell me about the God in whom you believe.” I think that’s what’s going on here... In other words, tell me about God, the God you believe in and pray to. Who is God for you?

This is personal for me, I grew up believing that God was mad at me, because I was always sinning. And Martin Luther had the same experience...

Luther initially thought of God as a righteous judge, who would throw him into hell because of his sin. He was so scared of God that he would actually keep a written list of all his sins.

Luther had a confessor, a guy by the name of Jon Staupitz... Luther would go to him on a weekly basis, and spend hours and hours confessing every single little sin

he had committed over the week. Reportedly, one-time Jon Staupitz told Luther to commit some sins that were at least interesting!

Luther was obsessed that God was going to cast him into hell... And he became ever more and more anxious. At that time in his life, he was probably that slave that would have buried the talent in the ground.

Biographers of Luther have documented how he came to his realization that we are justified by Grace through Faith. It began as he was teaching a class on the Psalms, and in the margins of his lecture notes, he came to see that God's judgment was to love. That God was love...

When Luther dared to believe it with all his heart, he would comment that it was as if the gates of heaven were flung wide open. All his anxiousness, all his fear, all his worry and dread were gone! It was transformational for him.

And this is what set the stage for an amazingly productive life. I don't think anyone in human history has ever written as much he has!

In fact, at Luther Seminary, they have an authentic plaster casting of his face and hands, after he passed away. While one hand is open, his other hand is in a position of holding a pen. At that time in his life, he was one of those slaves that the master entrusted with five talents, and Luther returned it with five more...

This idea that God is love, gives us such peace and comfort... It a place of trust, and confidence, a foundation to build a mutual relationship. And this is exactly

what God invites us into and desires. God wants to be in relationship with us. To be in love; a love that overflows and creates trust and richness.

In our parable it's those two slaves that return an abundance and they enter into the joy of their master.

Brothers and sisters, we're in a tough time right now with this corona virus. Schools are going back to on line learning. Hospital ICU's are filling up. We're all tired of dealing with it... We're angry and frustrated... I'll admit, I am.

And yet, it's exactly in times like this, I find myself in prayer. Perhaps more than usual. And my prayer is that we continue to find ways to love one another. And I know I'm not the only one praying. Because I experience it, in your kindness, in your encouragement, it's in your smiles and on your faces—when I can see them!

God loves us, we love one another; and frankly we'll get through this, because nothing can separate us from God's love... Amen...