**Matthew 25:14-30 (ESV)**

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. **15** To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. **16** He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. **17** So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. **18** But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. **19** Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. **20** And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ **21** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **22** And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ **23** His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ **24** He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, **25** so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ **26** But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? **27** Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. **28** So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. **29**  For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. **30** And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

**“The Master Makes The Difference”**

 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. To “invest” is a common word in our society. It comes naturally from a system built on capitalism. People invest daily over this mysterious thing called, “the stock market.” Parents fret over how to invest in their children’s futures. Those who work seek to invest for a rainy day or when they can retire. Some also look at a bigger picture where the world needs to invest in its future with natural resources. Sadly, even the parable of The Talents by Jesus has been absorbed the same way. Much false preaching revolves around investing for prosperity as the bottom-line and not God wanting to save us from sin, death, and the Devil.

 Of course, when Jesus told this parable of The Talents it was during Holy Week. He was not preaching about a faith driven by profit for this life. Instead, the divine love Jesus would give concerned faith responding to His sacrifice. The parable of the Ten Virgins last week ended with Jesus declaring, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” It is during this time of watching for Christ’s return that the parable of the Talents takes shape. What Jesus would at last entrust to His disciples was to benefit His Kingdom. The baptized in Christ has the same entrustment still today as His Church. Waiting for the coming of Christ means service to a master who makes the difference.

 Jesus in His parable gives special credit to the generosity of the master. Before leaving for a journey, all his servants received an entrustment of money. Rather than first reacting to what seems like favoritism, we need to understand the value of a single talent. If a person worked a day for a denarius, a talent would roughly be twenty years of labor. In other words, whether five, two, or one talent all the servants received a generous gift. The basis for the amount given came down the master’s judgment based upon “each according to his ability.” Even after the master returns to settle accounts, it was never about the money over against another. Those who received praise heard the same approval, “You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.”

 Jesus our master has made the difference for all His servants. As the baptized, He claims each of you as servants because of His sacrifice. Yet, St. Paul also reminds those in the Church, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (Romans 12:6). The talent of money in the parable is the word we now connect today to the skills or gifts we each have. “Our Lord gives no one more than he can handle nor less than his ability requires” (Bul’s notes). Some more, some less, but all have something from the God of grace. Most consider “talent” to be in the big cities and bustling churches, but the amazing fact is small towns and humble churches cannot be as wasteful. Everyone has a place to contribute and every person matters. Even with little there is still much.

 The parable of Talents takes a sharp turn after the master leaves. Where two of the three servants use what they have, one servant despises his master. He distanced himself from being a servant by digging a hole and burying the money. Hiding the talent meant it was dead to him. If this were not enough, when he finally gave an account his words sealed the outcome. He attempted to justify his actions by blaming the master! The generosity his master gave was generously thrown back in his face. Being afraid of the master was only a mask for something more deceiving. The master saw through it. “You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.” Faith without works is dead.

 Like the lazy servant, we easily end up shortsighted over how Jesus has made a difference. The Father’s love has come not in money, but in the Word made flesh, in the gift of His Son. However, our sinful flesh is selfish to bury what we have received from the Gospel covering it up with earthly matters. The ways of men also keep crying out around us against God turning away from His Son because that sounds too scary a love or has no tolerance. Likewise, the Devil rages on by mocking God not only with those falling into moral wrongs, but even others failing to do what is right. Rather than an excuse of fear for lack of motivation, look at the wisdom of kingdom David who feared God saying, “Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you” (Psalms 143:2). Christ is the only master who has come into this sinful world to make Himself the servant. He saves us not by acceptance of sin, but with an answer of forgiveness for sinners. The cross promises God was not lax in love. He has given His life as a ransom for many.

 Where the one servant feared His master falsely, the others trusted Him because He was generous. They served without reservation since their focus was on Him who was trustworthy. Their answers when giving account to the master followed the same simple pattern. Master, you gave me this “behold” I have made this much more. It was not about who did more or who did what just that a good tree bore good fruit from trust in their master. The emphasis was not about money, but the value of these servants to the master. He declared, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” The servants were different for a time, but in the end received the same treatment. The generosity that first gave to them is the generosity that at last let them live in the presence of the One they served.

 To live in the joy of our master Jesus is the difference that lets us serve Him without fear. He comes now by Word and Sacrament to greet us with His faithful service able to forgive, restore, and save. The baptized have this promise from our master. “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). Service to God in life differs as much as we are each individuals with various gifts to use for a time. Yet, no service on our part earns a place in Christ’s eternal kingdom. He brings it out of His own generosity. It is to the servants who alone trust in Him as they serve. As our Lutheran Fathers teach, “He will also strengthen, increase, and support to the end the good work that He has begun in them, if they cling to God’s Word, pray diligently, abide in God’s goodness, and faithfully use the gift they received” (FC SD XI 21).

 Waiting for the coming of Christ means service to a master who makes the difference. Jesus fully invested Himself for our benefit. He brings this good news of His saving presence among us still today. Whatever entrustment we have in talents for a time now benefits His kingdom that has no end. It is an investment unlike any other unable to fail for the master is generous. We have the blessing to live by faithfulness that is productive for it looks with confidence to what Christ has done, is doing, and will do for us. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.