



Three slaves. Eight Talents. (By some estimates, in first century life, a Talent was equal to nine years worth of wages for a skilled laborer. So today, maybe \$450,000 each?) The first slave receives five Talents — about \$2.5 million. The second slave receives two Talents — about \$1 million. The third slave receives one Talent — about a half million dollars. No small amount here! The first two slaves have similar experiences. They trade with their Talents. They double their holdings. The master returns “after a long time” and settles accounts with them. Quite pleased with them, the master responds to each slave: “Well done... you have been trustworthy... enter into the joy of your master.”

The third slave has a different experience. He digs a hole, protects what has been entrusted to him, and returns it in full to the master. The master is deeply displeased, and announces: “You are wicked and lazy... you ought to have (at least) invested my money... take it away from him and throw him out.”



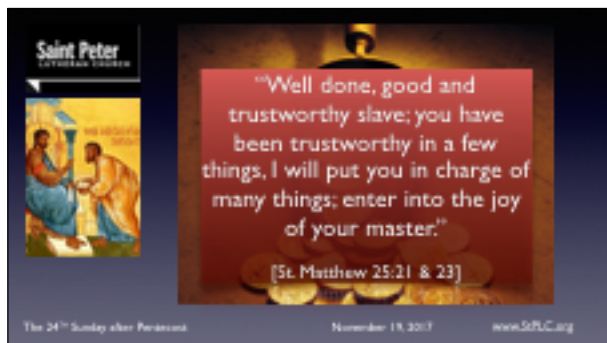
There has been a great deal of discussion about the fact that two of these slaves are commended by their master and one isn't. Obviously, the two have done something the one hasn't done. What is it? Is it using money in a way that produces more? Capitalists would like that, right? Is it boldly taking risks instead of fearfully burying one's riches in the ground? Daredevils would like that, right? Is it using whatever talent one has to be successful? We might like that, ourselves. I know a Talent refers to money in the first century, not a gift or a ability that you or I might have — but that is such an easy connection to make, that you can hardly not at least give it some consideration.

No. Actually none of these gets at the heart of the difference between the two slaves and the one.



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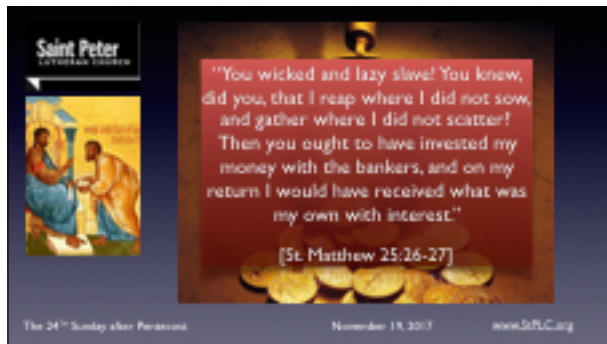
The difference is that the first two slaves act in a way that brings joy to the one who gave them all that money in the first place. The third slave actually points it out, right? When he returned to the master the coin he had received, he said, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid...” Of all that can and can’t be known about the master, here is the one thing that can be known for certain: this guy likes to make money. When his first two slaves double his money, he is thrilled.



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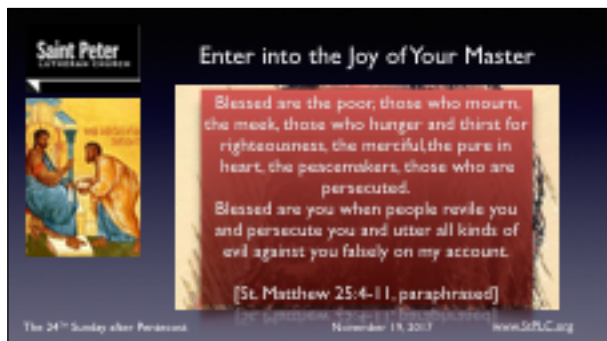
He says to both of them, using the exact same words, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” Good. Trustworthy. Placed in charge. Enter into joy. Pretty high praise for a couple of slaves, isn’t it? They have obviously hit the ball out of the park. He loves to make money. They have just made him a ton of money — maybe a sum equal to three and a half million dollars in today’s money. Well done, good and trustworthy slave.

And how does he respond to the third slave? The one who received one Talent? A sizable amount, maybe somewhere in the order of a half million dollars in today’s economy?



He calls him wicked, lazy and worthless. He takes the Talent away from him and gives it to one of the slaves who doubled what had been given to him. He throws him into the outer darkness where, Jesus tells us, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. He is furious that his money at least didn't accrue interest while he was gone. And he is right, isn't he? If this third slave knew that the master always expects a strong return on any investment he makes, it was a terrible mistake to have not, at least, placed it in a savings account where he could pick up a few percent's worth of interest.

So the point seems clear. The slaves who brought the master joy are commended — they have done exactly what they should have done. The slave who distressed the master is condemned — he has done exactly the opposite of what he should have done.



But here's the real question. If this master experiences joy when he gets a return on his money, what is it that causes God to experience joy? Jesus isn't giving us investment advice here. He isn't lecturing us on the importance of taking risks. He isn't discussing the best use of our gifts and abilities.

No: it's actually simpler than that. He is commanding us to live in ways that bring joy to God. And what are those ways? Jesus makes it pretty clear in his first public sermon — the Sermon on the Mount. He says, Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.



In these opening words to the story of Jesus we discover what brings God joy. It is when those who are in need here in this world become the recipients of mercy. It is when those who call themselves believers give of themselves in gracious and sacrificial ways. It is when the faithful stand up for what pleases God, even when others around them oppose them and work against them with intensity.

It is a circle of blessing, really. When we enter into the work that brings God joy, we are invited into the heart of God's joy. When we experience God's joy, we find ourselves wanting to do more of this work. And help ourselves to experience more of this joy.

Which will cause us to do even more of this work. Do you see any end to this at all? I sure don't.

It's beautiful. It's powerful. It's sacred.



We've tried to talk about that this year at Saint Peter through the Five Narratives we lifted up in January. These are five stories we believe God is trying to tell through through Saint Peter. Stories we think are very important to our life together. Stories we believe bring joy to God. As we gather together in worship and prayer, as we serve our neighbor in need, as we help one another to grow more deeply into the faith we share, as we care for one another here in this congregation, as we invite others to experience the faith we know in Christ Jesus... as we do all of this, can't you just see God with a great, infectious smile?



I know that those of us who have become involved in the living out of these narratives have found great joy in the effort. How might you join them? Which of these areas do you feel gifted and motivated to support? Know that as you become involved, there is the possibility that you too might have the experience of those first two slaves in today's parable. You too might come to know the joy God has when this kind of work is done.

The one who takes joy in this work, who calls us to this work, and who empowers us for this work; this one promises that as we go about it we too will experience the same joy.



I should mention that the image of the laughing Jesus you have seen on these slides is one I first saw when I was in High School. It was a surprising image to me because up until that time, I had seen a few images of a kind and loving Jesus, but most of the paintings and drawings that I knew pictured him as a more serious and severe man. I suppose, in my own mind, I pictured him that way too.

The original image was first created more than 40 years ago by Willis Wheatley, a member of the United Church of Canada. He was trying to depict the joy Jesus experienced, even in the most trying of experiences. It has become one of the most popular modern depictions of Jesus.

It is a good one for us to recall, as we reflect on his parable of the Talents, and its intent to draw you and me into the Joy of our Master.

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Take It Home!

Let's keep the conversation going. Our hosts will have a 7-day devotional guide for you as you leave today.

Question for this evening's conversation: "How have I put my talents — my gifts and abilities - to work for those things that matter to God?"

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As you leave today, our hosts have a 7-day devotional for you. Let's spend the next couple of days reflecting on this morning, and preparing ourselves for next Sunday.

We'll start with some time wondering what each of us can do that brings joy to God's heart, and allows us to enter into that joy. I'd love to hear what you come up with. Let me know, if you would.

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The Last Word

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.
[Winston Churchill]

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Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." That's the kind of life to which Jesus calls us. A life of love and compassion and generosity. A love that folds us into God's joy. May God grant us the grace to know this kind of life!

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Saint Peter
LUTHERAN CHURCH

Hymn of the Day

Please stand as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.

1st Service: Lord of Light
(page #35)

2nd Service: We Are the Light
(page #32)

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14

Saint Peter
LUTHERAN CHURCH

St. Matthew 25:14-30 (slide #1)


25:14 [Jesus said] "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money."

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Saint Peter
CATHOLIC LITURGY

St. Matthew 25:14-30 (slide #2)



19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'


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Saint Peter
CATHOLIC LITURGY

St. Matthew 25:14-30 (slide #3)



24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter 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 replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.'

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Saint Peter
LITURGICAL LECTURE

St. Matthew 25:14-30 (slide #4)



29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ”

The illustrations are by the Rev. Fr. Thomas M. Shannon, Director of the Office of Liturgical Services, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

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