

You are a Gifted Servant

I. Your Master gives generously

II. Use your gifts with joy

“Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been.” The poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, penned these words. We may not know exactly what he had in mind when he first wrote them, but we all understand his point: What a sad thing to see wasted talent, wasted resources, wasted opportunities!

In our lesson from Matthew 25, Jesus is speaking to his disciples three days before he died. He was telling them how he would soon be leaving them. He wanted them to be ready for the days to come. But he also wanted them to understand he had called them to be his followers. And, he was not leaving them unprepared. Jesus richly blesses his followers with many gifts. He equips them for living as his people. He wants them to use what he had given them to live out their calling.

The verses before us today are an illustration of Jesus’ point. He says to each of you, “You are a gifted servant!” As you consider your gifts, also reflect upon how generously your Master gives and what a joy it is to use your gifts!

Jesus tells a story here to teach us about using our gifts. There was a man who was going on an extended vacation. This man was rich—very rich. He has at least three men working for him in his home. While he was gone, he wanted to give these men an opportunity. So he entrusted some of his investments with them. Not only is this man rich, he is also generous. Look at the amounts of money he entrusts to his servants: 5, 2, and 1 talent. It may not seem like a lot of money, but in today’s economy we might think of the gifts he gives in terms of 5, 10, and 25 thousand dollars. That’s pretty generous! And yet he also shows his wisdom and shrewdness alongside of his generosity. He gives to each man according to his ability. He does his best to set them up for success.

The man was even generous in his response to his servants after his return. He praises them, “**Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.**” You did well! You did the best with what you I gave you! You were faithful, and now I will give you even greater things. You thought I was generous before! My joy is yours; your place is at my side. “**Come and share you master’s happiness!**” They were gifted servants; how generous their master had given to them!

Jesus makes one main point with each of the stories he tells. What is the point Jesus is making here? He, as our Lord and Master, is generous beyond belief with his blessings, and you see his generosity, don’t you?

Let’s start with spiritual blessings. He has called you to be his child. In Holy Baptism, he adopted you into his family – how rich is that! In his Word and at his table, he continues to assure you are still his child in spite of your sins. He gives you called workers to preach and teach his Word among you. We can worship together freely with brothers and sisters in Christ in this beautiful building. We could go on!

We also must think of the abilities and talents he gives you. Each one of you has a unique set of gifts. He gives gifts in many areas of life: skill in working with your hands, athletic ability, ability in math or science or language, skill in music or drawing or design. We see his gifts in other ways too. There are hard workers, caring encouragers, good friends, gifted leaders, willing volunteers, and again we could go on and on.

Our Master also generously gives material blessings. Think of your homes, cars, food, and the extra time and money you can spend on just having fun! Your Master is so generous! You have been so richly blessed in so many ways! In your calling as children of God, you have the privilege to use the generous gifts of your Master as you live as his gifted servant.

Think about what a privilege that really is! To put that into perspective, imagine if you were to become a trusted servant of a famous person? What if you wanted to be the personal assistant for Kentucky native George Clooney, Warren Buffett, or LeBron James? Can you imagine what the interview would be like? You would be thinking, "How's my résumé? How do I look? What should I say?" You know they will only hire the perfect candidate: one who has the right skills, a compatible personality, just the right amount of experience, and ultimately someone that can get things done. What a privilege to be chosen, but how many of us would really have a shot at that job? Now, what if we were applying for that same position before the Master of heaven and earth? Why would God pick me to manage anything? And yet he does! Because he gives generously! What a privilege!

Now, how faithful have you been as a manager? In regards to your offerings do you think, "I've been blessed with 20 talents, and so what if I give as if I only had 2 talents? Talk to those who give nothing! Let them help pick up the financial burden around here!" With those with fewer gifts may say, "I don't have much to give. Let those with greater gifts than I support the church. I have nothing to give!"

Isn't it easy to make excuses with our time and our abilities, too? "When compared to others, I don't have as many talents. I haven't been given many gifts, if any at all. So, I'm sure the Lord is not expecting quite so much of me. They are small gifts. They are more useful to me anyway. I'm sure he'll understand. Besides, I'm the servant who only received one talent." The point about the third servant wasn't the fact that he was given less. The point was this: he had been given all that he needed. He had all the gifts. He wasted his talents and his time.

Do we have a tendency to behave like the third servant? Lazy and unfaithful, unused gifts, wasted opportunities, and full of self-pity? He "**went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.**" This action took more work than just putting in the bank. Is that not us at times?

Every now and then a letter will arrive in my mailbox that says, "You were listed as a reference for so-and-so, so-and-so is in the process of being approved for top-level security clearance. To the best of your knowledge, is there any reason so-and-so should not be given the responsibility of top-level security clearance?" To the best of your knowledge, is there any reason why God, the Master of heaven and earth, would give us anything to manage, much less welcome us at the door to his eternal home and enjoy his happiness? Mistakes called sins fill our résumés. Failures from not doing the good things we should have done fill our reports cards. The stains of the wrongs we have done cover our best interview outfit.

Then why does he give us generous gifts? Why does he entrust us to manage those gifts? Because of the very first gift he ever gave to you, your baptism. Through baptism he made you the perfect candidate for managing his gifts – an extreme makeover if you will – all paid at his expense.

Philippians 2:7 tells us, "**Christ Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, he humbled himself.**" Jesus never wasted his time. He never wasted an opportunity to spend time with God's Word, even though he was the Son of God. He never wasted his abilities, but always used his talents faithfully. He never once compared the balance in his checkbook with others. He always thanked his Father for his generosity and used those gifts faithfully. Not only was his life perfect, but the blood he shed was enough to wash away your sins.

At your baptism, Jesus replaced your résumé of sin with his perfect life. He replaced your failures with his triumph. In the waters of baptism he washed the stains from our suits with his blood. He did it all on his dime. His gift will never fade. It lasts for eternity.

Because of his grace, your Master has hired you to be his personal assistant. By his mercy he has given us generous gifts to manage! He gives us his own Son! He gives us spiritual gifts, material gifts, abilities and talents, and generously! What a truly gifted servant you are! So now, how can you use those gifts to serve with joy?

As far as financial gifts go, you will simply sit down, look at your monthly budget and decide, "How can I be faithful and generous to my God with my offerings?" As far as your gift of time goes, look at your calendar. Are there things on that Blackberry or planner that could be cleared out or rearranged so that you can be a faithful servant with your time and spend that time with God's Word...daily? What about your abilities or talents? Some of you know your gifts and are putting them to use at this church. Others may still be trying to explore how to use their gifts. And some of you don't have a clue! But that's ok. That's why you're here, to discover your gifts and put them to use. One of the ways you can discover your abilities or talents is by completing a spiritual gifts analysis. They will be available to you in the fellowship hall during Adult Bible Class time today. Another way to discover your talents is by volunteering at church. A list of possible activities and boards and committees will also be available during Adult Bible Study time this morning. Or just ask a church council member, "What needs does the congregation have? How can I fill those needs?"

When you discover your gifts and put them to use, which of three servants will you be? There's one of two ways. Will it be with the attitude of the third servant? Not any more! When you view yourself as God sees you – a perfect and gifted servant – then you will respond that way in your Christian living. In the story, notice how the first two servants responded to their master's generosity. These two sprang into action "at once." They were faithful. They made the most of their gifts, both their abilities and the money entrusted to them. When the master returned, they considered it a privilege to return the profit to their Lord, who says "**Well done, good and faithful servant!**"

My fellow servants, recognize: God has blessed you generously! You are a gifted servant! You will discover what those gifts are. You will put them into practice. You will be joyful and thankful servants. And above all, you will be faithful servants. And when the Master comes again, he will say to you and to me, "Well done, good and faithful servants! Come, and share your Master's happiness!" Amen.