



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA
Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick
The 24th Sunday After Pentecost
Sermon Title: "Enter the Joy of Your Master"
Gospel Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Have you ever walked in on the tail end of a conversation and wondered how it got there?

Today's gospel reading can feel like that. Jesus has been speaking for some time in Matthew about the the ushering in of God's kingdom. This kingdom will be at odds with powers of the world, so he warns of the danger of being misled by rumors, wars, famines and upheaval. Even as the kingdom of God and the coming of Christ will be unfolding, he warns, there will be false prophets and love will grow cold. The Son of Man will come, but we don't and cannot know the day or the hour. So in the midst of all that swirls around us, faithfulness will falter. We will struggle to keep perspective. Remaining faithful and trusting and seizing opportunities along the way in prolonged waiting, as Pastor Schul shared last week, is no easy task. After telling us to keep alert for the promised kingdom, Jesus today tells this tale of what happens in that in between time using the master who left some of his servants in charge with varying results.

On the surface this teaching can be about what we do with what we are given- a question then and now. But equally important is the question of what we expect.

What we expect of the master, of God, will color everything else. The core is about God. There is no shortage of people who proclaim a vengeful God, so much so it can be hard to hear words intended to stir us to course correct by being over literal.

So right up front I want to say-The gospel is that faithfulness, ours and God's, opens the door to joy, not only some day, but now. We are given the chance to place faith in and take risks for a kingdom of joy.

Now let's go deeper.

James Jangknegt has painted a modern day depiction of this parable, with a "Boss" in a suit as the "master" figure and three men in a modern context. In the upper left hand corner the three men are being given money. One side then depicts one man as an artist, with painting supplies, an easel and art created and sold in vibrant colors. The second side shows one depicted

as a farmer- planting and harvesting crops that presumably feed others and support many, again in a joyous display.

The third man is in the center of the painting, sitting in a lawn chair, with fries and a soda knocked over, shocked as the master has returned. But more striking is what lies around and below him in the earth where he buried the money.

You see drab darkness, the money buried, but also dead roots, old bones of things no longer living and a watch that has stopped. Symbols of opportunity buried.

Jesus calls us into opportunity.

Over my lifetime I have been confounded by this parable as I have heard it preached as a "get busy or else" story that can sound even harsh and unrelenting in a view of insufficiency.

But let's explore what truth we can harvest grounded in who the the master really is.

The measure of money given the men, known as a talent, was no small sum. Five talents would be the equivalent of over 70 years of wages. Two talents over 30 years and so on. Money and time have been entrusted to those who work for the master.

They have been entrusted in faith by the Master.

The first two reflect back that trust in faithfulness. They immediately set about doing what elsewhere in Matthew we hear the master is to do- providing for those in his midst, giving them their food in due season. This happens when they build relationships, they buy and sell, they participate in community.

The one who didn't do anything except bury what he has been given depicts a different response.

He didn't trust the one who trusted him, much less those around him, so he projects his own insecurities- "you are harsh," "you don't work for what you get."

He doesn't trust the Master- he is afraid.

This is what fear can do to any of us. We miss out on the opportunity for joy. Fear perpetuates isolation, turning inward, and shutting down. It makes us look at others with skepticism, and bitterness and stunts growth.

Perhaps the greater consequence than monetary stinginess is a stinginess of heart. What the slave suggests about the master is really about himself- his heart has grown cold, the very thing Jesus warned of earlier.

A line in the gospel reading we can overlook I think is critical. When the master returns he is there to settle accounts, not settle scores. What gives him greatest joy is being able to celebrate the continuation of his kingdom work and exclaim not only "well done," but "enter into the joy of your master." God wants to rejoice in us. And join us deeper into joy. Do you hear it? The master, our Lord, wants us to enter into the joy of the master, the fullness of what the kingdom can be. It's a generosity of heart.

In our modern day painting, envision of all of the lives touched by the heart of the artist depicted- the seller of art supplies, the joy of owning a thing of beauty, the satisfaction of having one's gifts recognized and valued, and God celebrating it all.

Does it mean that the artist never had a bad art day? No, but faithfulness brought joy in time.

Think of everyone the farmer employed, in the field in the grain mill, and beyond. Do we think the farmer never had a season of worry? Of course not, but imagine that celebrated harvest in time.

Do you think the two slaves never wondered where this was all headed or how long? Imagine any of our doubts, fears, hurts and uncertainties here.

What grew in the two slaves, no matter which depiction speaks to you, are three things- humility, trust and devotion. Heart things. These things shaped everything. And in faithfulness led to joy. For them and others because of who they saw the master to be. See the heart of the master.

If we start by envisioning a harsh and callous God, nothing will grow. In fear, we see our neighbors with eyes of mistrust, not joy. If hearing "evil, worthless and lazy" in this story bothers you, it should.

And in this contentious time we don't need anyone else spreading that message. If we see things that way, and just hunker down and bury opportunity in the ground for another day, it dies.

Then the master is only taking away what was already thrown away.

When the master reclaims it, it is so it can grow.

We are here to help that kingdom of Christ grow.

Remember this important line, "enter into the joy of the kingdom."

That's a kingdom worth working for, worth risking for, and worth proclaiming with our lives.

Our Master and Lord, gives us the opportunity of time and talents, the promise of joy and grace along the way.

Never doubt it. Our world sure needs it.

In the meantime, and trusting our Master, let's ask:
"how can I grow the joy of our Master?"

AMEN