

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our Gospel lesson we hear of what seems to be a generous landowner. On the other hand we hear also that the Landowner treats some of his servants harshly. So when we listen, reflect, and discern this parable before us today we overlook the generosity because we fear the Master who takes back all that he gives. In this we reflect and discern this parable in the context of fear of this Master that reaps where He does not sow, and gathers where He did not scatter seed. This parable then instigates our comparisons and judgments as we imagine standing before this Master and reviewing our lives in comparison to one another.

We compare our lives and our faith to one another because we can elevate ourselves by stepping on the other person and in turn feel pretty good about ourselves and how we have “invested” our faith. We compare ourselves with one another and judge others because we know that when we compare our lives to Jesus Christ, we find that we are the ones who have buried what has been given us and we find ourselves very frightened because we are very afraid of this Master and dark outcome of this parable. But if this all we take from our discernment of this parable we need to ask then, do we only “invest” our faith in God out of fear, or do we do it out of love for God? Do we only invest for our own gain, or do we invest to increase praise and thanksgiving to God?

Today our Gospel lesson comes on the heels of the parable that we heard last week of the ten bridesmaids who await the bridegroom with their lamps and oil in hand. Similar to last week, this parable today tells us of a landowner who goes on a journey, leaves “talents” and NO instructions with three slaves, two of whom use them productively and one does not, and we hear that the one who does not suffers accordingly...as Matthew writes it:

³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matt 25:30)

And so, in light of our fear of this outcome of darkness we begin our investments of comparison and judgment of one another. And once again, in our discernment of this parable we make it all about our good works, our wise fiscal investments and we overlook God’s ultimate investment in us of faith, light, and life.

The term “talent” in this parable is used in an odd sort of way that we may not be so familiar with. The English term “talent” as we know it today, refers to God given abilities or natural aptitude or skill. However, before the term became part of the English language its origin is based in the context of this parable. So, when Jesus is referring to a talent he is referring to a weight or unit of currency, used by the ancient Romans and Greeks. One talent held the value of a day laborer’s wages for 15 years of work in that time period. In today’s equivalency of purchasing or investment power, the landowner gives 5 talents to the first slave that is the equivalency of \$1,413,750.00. To the next slave the landowner gives, \$565,500.00. To the last slave he gives, \$282,750.00.

The investments of these three slaves then becomes the focus of the parable...oh we must invest wisely and if we don’t, well, into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. With the focus on investing and how we think we must invest our faith starts to sound

like orientation day on Wall Street...welcome to the money game of salvation, invest and you will be rewarded, save without interest, and you will be cast out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is what bubbled up in last week's parable and once again this week, so again, I ask, is Jesus teaching us that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? Does our faith and does our salvation operate out of a capitalistic paradigm? Does this mean that this parable is to be viewed and understood through a capitalistic context or lens?

If we turn our fiscal view away from ourselves and our interpretation of profitable investment of our faith...we may begin to see that this parable is not about profit and gain, it is about a faith that has been given to us to use as freely as it has been given. Our faith is given, but it is not taken back by a Master, we are taken back. We are not cast out to the outer darkness because, through the faith given us, we are the light that no darkness can overcome.

Every week we confess a faith that is freely given to us using either the Nicene or the Apostles' Creeds. In the Third Article: On Being Made Holy we confess:

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen**

When we confess this we are confessing that we believe that by our own understanding or strength we cannot believe in Jesus Christ our LORD or come to him, *but instead* the Holy Spirit has called us through the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, makes us holy and keeps us in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Along with that, we confess that we believe that daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. We also say and believe that on the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. I truly believe this article and Luther's explanation of it to be most certainly true.¹

We DO NOT confess or BELIEVE this all happens because we did the correct thing with our faith, such as investing it wisely. The only way to keep our faith is to give it away...with no sense or need of gain...to give it as freely as it is given us. Nonetheless, when I only see the parable in a capitalistic view of "my" investment and "MY" fiscal understanding then yes, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. From this capitalistic perspective, we all know then that God is NOT as smart as even the average capitalist investor.

When considering investments, profit and gain, God will go bankrupt because nobody can continue to give more than they produce. But if we still see the gain and loss of faith due to our investments than ask, how do we make our faith richer than another? What does a richer faith look like? Or where or how do we get MORE faith or a richer faith...especially when faith only need be the size of a mustard seed, the size of a period on a page. How do we "invest" when

¹ Kolb, Robert ; Wengert, Timothy J. ; Arand, Charles P.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, The Small Catechism: The Creed, The Third Article: On Being Made Holy, pages: 355-356, par 5-6.

Jesus himself teaches us that two pennies from an old widow holds more value than all other abundant wealth of many rich people.

From the Greek, listen again to what Jesus says to us today,
“For it is as if a man, going on a journey,
summoned his slaves and hands over his possessions to them.”

In the same way Jesus also hands over to us his possessions, as he says to us:

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.” If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. (John 14:27-29)

Our Master Jesus left on a journey, he is going away, and he is coming to us. In the meantime, He has handed over to us his possessions, His peace, and a faith. But in our fear, our struggles, and in the challenges that confront our faith, we bury it and keep it hidden. In this sense then, we bury our faith in our doubt when we are challenged and cannot understand how it works. Sadly, instead of investing it, we compare it by judging others and other things around us with the intent that our faith will grow when it looks better than theirs. But we merely bury the true worth of our faith when we compare and judge instead of using it, depending on it at all costs, or just simply giving it away.

The faith we are given or blessed with is not an investment the way in which we understand investing, the only way to keep our faith is to give it away as freely as it has been given to us and to give it WITHOUT the expectation of a profit or a gain. And we grow our faith and strengthen our faith by sharing it freely by being the grace, the peace, and the light within the competitive darkness of this world.

This assembly of believers is light...a light that NO darkness can overcome. We have been given that light of faith and if we don't bury that light of faith in our fear or in our doubt the darkness can never overcome us nor can we be cast out into it. Jesus reminds us in the Gospel of John that:

³⁵ ... ‘The light is with you.... Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. (...) ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.’
(John 12:35-36)

As St. Paul reminded the Thessalonians today in our Epistle reading:

for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.
(1 Thessalonians 5:5)

But there remains one disturbing line to be reckoned with.

'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; (Matt 25:24)

For me, this line is the Good News, it is comfort to know how far God goes to be with us...and to remain with us. This line reminds me of the God I am to fear, love, and trust above all things. I am commanded to turn to this God in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise, and give thanks to. I've come to think that this sounds harsh, but I've also learned that this is the God we worship. This is the same God who reaps where He did not sow, and gathers where He does not scatter seed and this is exactly where God finds Adam and Eve when they fall and He sought them out even in their sin.

This is the same God that welcomes sinners and eats with them, the same God that searches out the one lost sheep despite leaving the ninety-nine, the same Master that rejoices when finding the lost one where he did not sow. Listen to how the Psalmist tells of the "harshness" of the Master, listen to how the Master reaps and gathers in Psalm 139:

¹ Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ² You trace my journeys and my resting-places and are acquainted with all my ways. ³ Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, but you, O Lord, know it altogether. ⁴ You press upon me behind and before and lay your hand upon me. ⁵ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain to it. ⁶ Where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁷ If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also. ⁸ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,⁹ even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast. ¹⁰ If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night," ¹¹ darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike. ¹² Search me out, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my restless thoughts. ¹³ Look well whether there be any wickedness in me and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

The Master in Jesus Christ descended among the darkness of the dead and brought them the light of day; when He ascended into heaven. In Jesus Christ, the Master brought new radiance to this darkened world. Today in this Holy Word and through this Holy Meal we know that the Master remains with us and through Jesus Christ, the Master is leading us along the paths of life until we come to rest with all the saints in the radiance of His holy dwelling-place, where with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit we may live and reign, now and forever. Amen.