

**Matthew 25:14-30**

<sup>14</sup>“Again, it’s like a wealthy landowner who was going on a journey and called in three workers, entrusting some funds to them. <sup>15</sup>The first was given five thousand dollars, the second two thousand, and the third one thousand, according to each one’s ability. Then the landowner went away.

<sup>16</sup>Immediately the worker who received the five thousand went and invested it and made another five. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the worker who received the two thousand doubled that figure. <sup>18</sup>But the worker who received the one thousand instead went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried the money.

<sup>19</sup>“After a long absence, the traveler returned home and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>The one who had received the five thousand came forward bringing the additional five, saying, ‘You entrusted me with five thousand; here are five thousand more.’ <sup>21</sup>“The landowner said, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful worker. Since you were dependable in a small matter, I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share my joy!’

<sup>22</sup>“The one who had received the two thousand then stepped forward with the additional two, saying, ‘You entrusted me with two thousand; here are two thousand more.’ <sup>23</sup>“The landowner said to this one, ‘Cleverly done! You too are a good and faithful worker. Since you were dependable in a small matter, I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share my joy!’

<sup>24</sup>“Finally the one who had received the one thousand stepped forward and said to the landowner, ‘Knowing your ruthlessness—you who reap where you did not sow and gather where you did not scatter— <sup>25</sup>and fearing your wrath, I went off and buried your thousand dollars in the ground. Here is your money back.’

<sup>26</sup>“The landowner exclaimed, ‘You worthless, lazy lout! So you know that I reap where I don’t sow and gather where I don’t scatter, do you? <sup>27</sup>All the more reason to deposit my money with the bankers, so that on my return I could have had it back with interest! <sup>28</sup>You, there! Take the thousand away from this bum and give it to the one with the ten thousand. <sup>29</sup>“Those who have will get more until they grow rich, while those who have not will lose even the little they have. <sup>30</sup>Throw this worthless one outside into the darkness, where there is wailing and grinding of teeth.’

**The Gospel of the Christ – Praise to you O Christ.**

I have to admit - it’s tempting to simply leave a parable like this morning’s behind.

It’s tempting to just gloss over the harder parts of this story – to ignore the harsh and judgmental images this narrative provides when it comes to this landowner and their workers.

It's temping because in the last few weeks we have already heard several tough parables about wicked tenants, unprepared bridesmaids, kings and wedding banquets, giving to God what is God's, and now we come upon the parable of the talents.

Haven't we heard enough?

Wouldn't it just be easier for us all to simply to flip over to the gospel of Luke and get a head start on all the glad tidings of great joy, angel choruses, and Christ's birth?

If the stores and our Netflix accounts can already have their full Christmas selections out why can't we just skip right on past this parable and head full on into Advent and Christmas?

I mean, do we really need to hear another perplexing parable about God's place within our lives and our world?

Yet, as temping as all this might be – it would be a great disservice to both you and this word to not spend the time wrestling with these difficult pre-Advent texts today.

And our text this Sunday is a doozy.

I think in part it's because these last teachings of Jesus hit a little too close to home. They call us to consider how we have or have not been good stewards of God's world. And it doesn't take long before we start to place ourselves in this parable today - wondering how we would have made out with such an extravagant investment.

After all, a talent wasn't just some small amount of money you might entrust to a friend. It was an economic measure equaling more than a lifetime's wages for a lower income worker or as other translations of this text share slaves could ever hope to amount. It was a term only the richest in society could afford to throw around when talking about their wealth. And so, the money this landowner entrusts his workers to look after is anything but pocket change - it's truly worth more than they would ever hope to see at once in their lifetime.

The first two workers entrusted with this gift prove that they almost have an unholy knack for sales, marketing, and investing. They easily manage the great estate they have been given, feeling freed by the lack of strings attached to the investment they take risks and grow their share. Almost seeming to have no trouble at all turning a 100% profit on the venture.

They prove they can manage to turn success into success until they finally hear of the landowners return. Who turns up to greet them with a pat on the back, a strong commendation, and a promise that they will be entrusted with far greater things in the future.

But the third worker – given only a sampling of the fortune the first two received, becomes paralyzed with anxiety over using, loosing, or abusing any part of this investment before the landowner returns. Unlike the first two workers who were set free by their gift – this worker become imprisoned by his fear over the vast fortune he had been entrusted with. Instead of risking uncertain ventures or even

putting the fortune in the bank, the third worker chooses instead to bury the gift in the earth until the investor returns.

And this is where the parable takes us in an interesting direction – because clearly these three workers have vastly differing opinions of their investor.

Even though the first and the second workers are given a vastly greater financial investments - they do not even bat an eye at using them to their fullest. There is no hint of fear when either of them approaches the wealthy landowner at the end of the parable – yet in the case of the third worker there is nothing but deep trepidation, worry, and guilt when he finally comes clean at the end.

Which caused me to wonder if these three individuals were even speaking about the same land owner at all?

It's not unusual for us to experience people in different ways. With different personalities and styles of leadership it would be easy for anyone to make an impression on a whole crowd in diverse ways.

Yet, the striking difference of opinions these workers paint of the wealthy investor simply doesn't add up.

When the third worker says "I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed," Even the land owner seems to have a hard time taking in what he is hearing.

"You knew, did you?" he responds calling out that judgement in doubt and perhaps even, expressing his outrage at that portrayal, which might explain his reaction as he deals with the worker according to his harsh characterization.

And while the investors response is over the top, it's clear that he is passionate about the opportunity he had given this third worker. An opportunity that had been squandered because of the workers distorted image of the landowner.

So maybe these workers are talking about the same wealthy landowner after all – but where does that leave us today?

More often than not, this parable has been read either as a warning against lazy stewardship of our many gifts in light of Christ's return or as an appeal to be actively preparing for the day of judgement when all accounts with God will be settled.

Perhaps that's understandable given its placement among other similar and seemingly end time parables in Matthews gospel. But I wonder if this parable might be a warning for us about how we come to picture God in our life here and now.

If you're anything like me – perhaps you need a healthy reminder every now and again that the messages we often receive in this world are not always from God. Message that tell us that we should

be afraid. That we should protect ourselves and our families from being vulnerable to those who may be different from us. Messages that tell us we will never be good enough, smart enough, or simply enough to make it in this world. Messages that threaten to beat our God given light away.

And before we know it, we find ourselves burying the gifts we have received from God hoping beyond hope that if we do – no one will steal them away.

Yet this is the very place St. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians speaks to us from today, declaring once and for all that God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ our savior.

As it turns out, if we only imagine God as stern, or even an angry old man in the sky, we will likely come to believe that everything bad in our lives is punishment from God.

However, if we can come to see God in terms of their grace, as the one who empowers, entrusts, and frees us to fully be the children of God, then we may be able to live out our life trusting all the more in the true hope our faith has given us.

For the God we see in Jesus is not, as it turns out, "a harsh God, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed," but rather as one always seeking to give more than we expected or deserved, and gathering what we offer back in joy.

And if this is an image of God you aren't used to hearing or seeing – or perhaps one you have forgotten after a particularly hard year, trust and know that God believed in this message of unconditional love and grace so much that he sent his son – Emmanuel – God with us - to tell us and show us time and time again. A message we will soon begin to ponder anew as Advent and Christmas draw near.

A message we will continue to proclaim both here and out within our world– that God is a God of Love, one who is always entrusting us with profound gifts of grace and love, eager for us to make the most of them, and inviting us always to enter the joy of our Lord.

So, this week I would invite you to live that message out.

Dare to uncover the gifts you may have hid away.

Gifts you were given to share God's love, grace, and compassion with a world in need.

Shining your God given light where it is most in need.

And may this be so among us – Amen.