

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
23rd Sunday after Pentecost
16 November 2014
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

“[The Kingdom of Heaven] will be like a man going on a journey...” (Mt 25:14)

That’s how today’s parable begins—and already, from the get-go, so also the confusion.

How is a kingdom like a man?

And last week: how is a kingdom like 10 virgins?

As we go through today’s parable, we’ve got to remember that it’s all about the kingdom,
and the kingdom is like a man.

And, as with most things, there’s only really two options for who this man is:
either it’s about one of us, or it’s about the God-man, Jesus.

And now that you know it’s all about Jesus, let’s pull this parable apart little by little.

First it begins with *a man going on a journey*.

He’s got servants, to whom He entrusts His property.

Again, it’s *His* property, and *He* gives it out.

Now, He’s obviously got a lot of property.

We know that from the measurements of talents.

The first servant gets 5 talents, the next 2, and the last 1—
each according to his ability (whatever that means!).

One talent in today’s money would be roughly \$828,400.¹

The guy given 2 talents, got just over 1.5 million;
and the guy with 5 received just over 4 million.

I actually checked out the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the Wichita area to get these numbers.
And I did so to help you realize that the “talents” being spoken of in this parable are *not*
“time, treasure, and talents.”

When our Lord deals with numbers, he does so to make a point.

Remember when Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive his brother 7 times,
thinking that to be quite a lot,

and Jesus said, “No, not 7 times, but seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22).

And Jesus certainly didn’t intend for us to count out 490 absolutions!

Well, right after Peter asked about how much forgiveness there should be,

Jesus told another parable; He said,

*“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king
who wished to settle accounts with his servants.” (18:23)*

¹ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics for Wichita as of May, 2013, an average yearly wage is \$41,420. http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_48620.htm#00-0000.

(So far, pretty similar to today's: King, Kingdom, and the settling of accounts.)

The first guy who comes in, Jesus says, "*owed him ten thousand talents.*" (18:24)
 Again, in today's numbers, that's roughly \$8.3 billion.

And what did the master do?

Well, when this servant fell on his knees, begging for mercy,
 the master, "*out of pity for him, released him and forgave him the debt*" (18:27).

When our Lord deals with numbers and counting, He does so to show how foolish it is.

To one servant He gives 5 talents, to another 2, to another 1.
 Each is given to simply because the man is going on a journey.
 Before the journey none were millionaires.
 But once given to, they are—and the one with 1 talent is at least closer than he was before.

All of this is to say how ridiculous it is when we try to see these talents as something within us.
 As if all it takes is a bit of work with what you've got.
 That's nonsense.

We've got other parables that tell us to work with what someone *else* has got:
 remember the one with the shrewd manager?

Again, there's a rich man who finds that His possessions are being wasted.

"*And he called him and said to him,*
'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management,
for you can no longer be manager.'" (Lk 16:2)

So the quick-thinking manager, realizing there's nothing in him that'll sustain him,
 summoned all the master's debtors and cut what they owed
 with the hope that at least he'd be received into their homes.

For this "*the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.*" (Lk 16:8)

Interestingly, Jesus goes on to explain that parable by saying,
 "*One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much.*" (16:10)

Again, that's how it goes when the talents are settled in today's parable.

The talents given by the man on a journey are so incomprehensibly large,
 that we know it's not just about the things we have and need to use.

In fact, the focus isn't on the talent at all.

What's amazing is that the talents seem to work by themselves.

Once received, the talent is to be used.

We're not told what the guy with 5 talents does, any more than that he traded with them.
 Same goes with the guy with 2.

Whatever it was, both had the exact same result: 5 talents made 5 more; and 2 made 2 more.

The difference with the guy who got 1 isn't the amount he got, but what he did with it.

It seems all he needed to do with the talent was head over to Wall Street.
Whether he picked the worst stock or not, the talent would've replicated itself.
And then he'd have one more than he was given—which would be just over \$1.5 mil!

But he didn't.

The joyful parable comes to a crashing halt all because the talent got buried.

After a long time of trading *and burying* the man returned to settle accounts.
The servant with 5 came forward with a big grin, full of joy, showing another 5 more!
And the one with 2 came forward—equally as pleased—and showed 2 more!
Both servants met the wide-grin of their master, and heard what they had only dreamed to hear:

*“Well done, good and faithful servant.
You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.
Enter into the joy of your master.”* (Mt 25:21)

But the one given 1 talent unsurprisingly comes last to settle accounts.
He's always feared this day.
He dreads seeing his master's face, *“for he knows that he's a hard man”* (25:24).
He was afraid:

afraid to lose the talent,
afraid to disappoint,
afraid to mess up, do wrong, to confess his sin.

This third *wicked and slothful servant*, did what he did because of how he pictured the Man.
He was happy to give the 1 talent back, that way he didn't have to worry about it anymore.
For him, it was a terrible burden to be given a talent.
“Here,” he says, *“have what is yours.”* (25:25)

And in that he uttered his own condemnation.
All the master wanted was to bring the servants into His joy.
So He gave them what was His.
To not want what is His—to have no part in what He's like—is to have no part in the Kingdom.
“For it will be like a man going on a journey.” (25:14)

This parable, then, isn't about the talents at all—
and especially not about what works we might do to reproduce and make more—
but about the Man going on a journey, and what He's like.

A talent, no matter how much it's actually worth, cannot compare with the *giver* of talents.

The man who buries the talent is the same man who was forgiven \$8.3 billion worth of debt,
only to demand the mere \$11 grand from one of his servants.
It's the same man who stumbles over the petition in the Lord's Prayer,
“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

This man is the older brother of the prodigal son.
 He's the guy hired at the first watch, but paid the same as the last guy in.
 He's the man at the wedding feast without the wedding garments.
 And the goat who would've done so much had he just known it was the Lord he was serving.
 And when it's all said and done, this man is a picture of *us* without faith—
 rejecting both the gifts and the giver of gifts.
 That is, it's a picture of getting the Man wrong.

We've got God all wrong if we think Judgment day is something to be feared;
 if we're hesitant to meet Him face to face;
 if we're afraid to confess our sins, as if He'll think any differently of us;
 if our picture of God is that of *a hard man*;
 if it's bitterness we feel and not joy—
 a life in constant comparison,
 always counting more for others and less for me,
 if it's a life without joy, without hope, and without love,
 then we haven't got a clue as to what our God is actually like.

Ours is the God who gives superabundantly more than we could ever imagine—
 and here, today, he gives it all to a whiney, crying, pukey, totally dependent *infant*.
 And such He has given also to you.

And He gives it in such a way that the only way you can mess it up, is to bury it.
 What He gives is Himself—
 His life and death,
 His forgiveness and love,
 and ultimately, His joy.

When that day of reckoning comes, you've got nothing to fear;
 for you know the Man who went on a journey.
 For that Man is the one born in Bethlehem,
 who carried the cross and bore your shame,
 who died for you and rose for you, and who now sits at the right hand of God the Father.
 He is the Man on a journey and will come again for you—
 suddenly, like a thief in the night, or labor pangs.

But when He comes, the light will be on, bags will be packed, and you'll meet His wide-grin,
 “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*
You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.
Enter into the joy of your master.” (Mt 25:21)

“*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*
who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.
Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up,
just as you are doing.” (1 Thess 5:9-11)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit