Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 25
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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Attitude toward your Master flows into actions for your Master.

"You see, the kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a journey. He called his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. **15** To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to still another one talent, each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. **16** The servant who had received the five talents immediately put them to work and gained five more talents. **17** In the same way, the servant who had received the two talents gained two more. **18** But the servant who had received one talent went away, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. **20** The servant who received the five talents came and brought five more talents. He said, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.'

21 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

22 "The servant who received the two talents came and said, 'Master, you entrusted me with two talents. See, I have gained two more talents.'

23 "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

24 "Then the servant who received one talent came and said, 'Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter seed. **25** Since I was afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

26 "His master answered him, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter seed? **27** Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers so that when I came I would get my money back with interest. **28** Take the talent away from him and give it to the servant who has the ten talents. **29** Because everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. **30** Throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

—Matthew 25:14-30

Imagine this scenario. You have just found out that you have terminal cancer. Even though you feel fine, the doctors have told you that you have one month to live. It will be sudden. It will be quick.

What would you do with that final month of your life? Would you call all your family members and make sure that you are leaving on good terms? Would you make sure all your bills are paid, your funeral is planned, your affairs are in order? Would you go about life like normal? Travel as much as possible? Or would you look for every opportunity to share Jesus with as many people as you know in those last few days?

The truth is we don't know how long we have left in this world. But God tells us that we need to be ready to leave this world at any moment. Either Jesus will take you out of this world or he will come back, and you don't know when that time will be. So, what does God want you to do with your time as you get ready?

The parable that Jesus teaches us this morning helps us with those questions. Jesus teaches us a powerful lesson today in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 25.

So, what is Jesus teaching us here? Well, there's one thing that is obvious about this story. The Master in Jesus' story is Jesus. He's the Master who goes away on a journey. He's the one who puts his money in the hands of his servants before going on a journey. Jesus is the one who expects his servants to do great things while he is gone.

So, what's Jesus teaching us here? Well, context helps. So, if you know your way around the Gospel of Matthew, you may notice that we are in chapter 25 of a 28-chapter book. Within a week of telling this parable, Jesus will have died on the cross and risen from the dead. One week. Just over one month from telling this story, Jesus will ascend into heaven. He knows that his time with his disciples is drawing to a close. He knows

he is leaving the world soon. So, Jesus is kind of like a man who is going on a journey. Before he leaves, he gives his servants work to do while he is gone.

So, that brings up the talents in Jesus' story. A talent is an ancient unit used to measure money, like lots of money. One talent was the equivalent of about 10 years of work. So, roughly speaking this man entrusted $8 million to his servants; $5 million to the first, $2 million to the second, and $1 million to the third. He gave different amounts, but he gave each one according to his ability.

So, what's the parable about? Jesus is going on a journey, and he's giving his disciples work to do. The equivalent of $8 million suggests that this wasn't busy work. Even with the servant who received $1 million, that was big time. That was high-stakes responsibility. And the question that Jesus wants each of his disciples to ask themselves is this: As I approach this work, what's my attitude going to be toward the Master and what he wants me to do?

So, you know these servants. They are still around. They work at your office. You go to school with them. On the one side are the go-getters. No matter what they are doing that day, they love their job. The glass is always half-full. Whenever anybody is talking about problems, they are talking about opportunities.

On the other side, you have the do-nothings. They are only there because they have to be. They are always looking at the clock. Never at a loss for something to complain about.

That's what this parable is about. It's about attitude. Don't get too obsessed with the varying amounts that the master entrusted to their care. The point simply is what it says. He gave each according to his ability. Jesus knows what each of you can handle.

And don't get too hung up on the returns of investments either. When the master comes back from his journey and the first two servants show the master their investments, what the master commends them for and rewards them for isn't due to their success. He doesn't say, "Well done, clever investor. You beat the market."

What he commends them for is *faithfulness*. **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful."** So, what is Jesus teaching us here? **Attitude toward the Master flows into action for the Master.** You see, six weeks after Jesus tells this parable, he's going to be standing in the same place on the Mount Olives with the same disciples, but he's going to be standing on the glory side of his crucifixion and resurrection. And his disciples are going to see Jesus lifting up his hands to bless them.

Holes still there from the nails. But they are symbols of victory, not defeat. They are going to hear Jesus bless them. And then they are going to hear him tell them, **"You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth."** He's got a big job for them. And that's the last they are going to see of him for a while.

He's like a man going on a journey, but before he leaves, he gives his servants work to do. But it's not busy work. It's important work. It's *his* work. "Be faithful with the gifts I am giving you." And he leaves them with this story ringing in their ears. What's my attitude toward this work?

It's about attitude. You can't see attitude. Attitude hides in the head and the heart. But it's not very good at hiding. Attitude flows over into behavior. And Jesus, the Master storyteller, he uses the words and actions of the servants in this parable to reveal the attitudes. So, when the first two servants receive their trust from their master, they run out immediately. And they put their Master's money to work. They are joyful about this opportunity.

And when the master returns, when they come to show their profits, it's like they are more excited that the master entrusted them with his money than they are to show their profits. They lead with **"Master, you entrusted five talents to me. Master, you entrusted two talents to me."** They are just so excited that the Master entrusted them with important work. Their attitude was one of joy.

Now compare that to the third servant. He was given $1 million to work with. And how does he respond? He wants nothing to do with it. He goes off and buries it and carries on as if he never received the assignment. And if that leaves any question with where his heart is, his words confirm what his actions imply.

So, his master returns. I picture him rolling out of his reclining chair, grabbing his shovel to dig up the talent, and dropping the bag of $1 million before his master. And he explains himself. This is the big reveal in the parable. Everything in the story has been leading up to this point. But when he starts talking, it's worse than we expected.

It turns out that this isn't a man who is unhappy at his job. We find out when he opens his mouth that he despises his master. **"Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not plant and**

gathering where you did not scatter seed. Since I was afraid, I went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours."

But here's the thing, he wasn't afraid. If you were truly afraid of your boss, would you talk to your boss that way? He wasn't afraid. He was angry at his self-centered, scrupulous boss, who only cared about making demands and finding fault and profiting on the backs of his subjects. That's his attitude toward his master. And who is going to want to pour himself out for someone like that? Right?

But was that really an honest representation of his master? Not at all. The Master's not looking to profit on the backs of his servants. They're his servants, but he treats them like his coworkers. He entrusts *his* money to them. His gain is their gain, and their gain is his gain. He's not squeezing them for profits. He's looking to rejoice over their faithfulness.

Isn't that what he wants? He tells the first two servants, I'm sure with a smile on his face, "**You were faithful with few things. I will put you in charge of many things."** He wants to share even more with them. **"Enter into the joy of your master."** He wants us to celebrate joy in his presence.

But the third servant? "**Throw that worthless servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** It's not because of his poor performance. It's because of his attitude. You know, I think you could say that he got what he wanted. He didn't want anything to do with his master. So finally, his master obliged.

What's Jesus teaching us here? **Attitude toward your Master flows into actions for your Master**. Let's examine our hearts and minds. How do you view your Master?

Do you see him as a merciless tyrant? A harsh man who forces his way into your life and immediately starts making big demands. He says, "Your money belongs to me. Your family is mine. You? You're not even your own. You belong to me." Do you see him as this tyrant who gives you this long list of back-breaking chores to do? "Oh, I gotta obey those 10 Commandments again. It's all about him, and not at all about me." Do you say, "Argh! Here he wants me to worship him again. This gets in the way of the things I want. I've got my sports and recreation to attend to. I don't have time for the Master." So, do you despise your Master?

Or maybe we can change the story. Imagine this scene. You find yourself waking up in a dark alley in *The Blade district* of west Phoenix. Your family is gone. You've pawned off the last of your possessions months ago. And you have no idea how you have been paying for your trips lately, and you don't want to know. You told yourself last week that was going to be the end. That lasted two days. Every time you stick a needle in your arm, you are flirting with death, but you can't help it.

But then someone comes to you and picks you up off the street. He takes you into his home and nurses you back to health. He adopts you into his family. He promises to give you everything that you need. He always has the knack for reassuring you. "This is where you belong."

And then he invites you to join him in his work. And he promises to give you all the resources you need to bring others in from the streets so that he can do for them what he has done for you. You're not in it alone. You're in it together with him. What's going to be your attitude toward that work?

What if it's even more than that? What if the stakes were eternal? What if the only way to set you free was for God to give his life? And what if he did? And what if he adopted you as his child? And invited you to come to him at any time of your life and he would respond? And what if he invited you to join him in his work of saving more people for eternity?

And what if he promises to give you all the resources that you need to go out? He promises to give you all the resources you need to bring more people in so that he can do for them what he has done for you. And he promises to go with you. And he promises to bless you. And he promises to make it make a difference.

What's your attitude going to be? You don't know how long you have, but doesn't your attitude go into action immediately? **Attitude toward your Master flows into actions for your Master.**

So, picture Jesus on the Mount Olives, same place where he told this parable. But he's on the glory side of his crucifixion and resurrection. Go ahead and picture yourself there too. He lifts up his hands to bless you. Holes still there. Symbols of victory, not defeat or threat. And he says to you, "I'm entrusting you with my greatest possessions, the saving message that pulls people off the streets of hell. Join me in this important work." And can't you just picture the smile on his face as he says, "**You were faithful with few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your Master."** Amen.