

Ready to Serve

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Twenty-fifth after Pentecost Sunday) is Matthew 25:14-30. This text is about the Parable of the Talents.

Aspects of the parable are easy enough to interpret, and all flow from the obvious central point: the master in the parable is Jesus himself. This means that in advance, Matthew's readers/hearers will believe that the master is good and gracious, whose authority to call his disciples to faithful service is completely valid. The slaves represent those who publicly claim the identity of being Jesus' disciples. The statement in 25:15 that the master entrusted differing amounts "to each according to his own ability" shows the wisdom and kindness of the master.

What might be a careful decoding of the "talents" in the parable? The closest parallel may occur in Jesus' direct teaching to his disciples in 13:11-12. Jesus, speaking to his disciples, declares, "To know the mysteries of the reign of heaven has been given to you. Jesus' disciples are to work with all that has been entrusted to them for the honor and advantage of the master.

It is not difficult to see that Jesus is telling His disciples that before long He will be leaving them. He will suffer and die and rise again and ascend into heaven. But that will not mean the work of His kingdom will stop in this world. No, He will rather provide His disciples with everything they need in order to continue that work.

To be sure, the monetary amounts entrusted to the various slaves are significant; recall that a talent (originally a measure of weight) was a lot of money in the ancient world, and one talent – the smallest amount entrusted – would be about six thousand day's wages, something like twenty years of salary.

The talents that our ascended Lord distributes to all believers are never exactly the same for any two individual (see 1 Cor. 12:4-11). But one gift is basic, and that is faith. Each of us must confess with Martin Luther, "I cannot by own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him," Faith is not a gift we can get along without, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6).

It may be true that the work of God's kingdom will get done without the support of those who have very limited means and talents. But we need to realize that God calls upon us to serve Him without individual talents, not because He cannot get along without our help, but rather because faithful service to Him is of great value to those who are serving.

The first two move in tandem, differentiated only by the number of talents entrusted to them. They apparently believe that as slaves of this particular master, they have a purpose and that is to serve him and seek to increase his possessions.

Our relationship to God and the world is one of stewardship. We are to use everything entrusted to us in such a way that it benefits God's kingdom.

Prayer: "Give me a faithful heart, Likeness to Thee, That each departing day Henceforth may see Some work of love begun, Some deed of kindness done, Some wand'rer sought and won, Something for Thee." Amen. (*TLH* 403:3) (*TLSB*)