**Matthew 25:14-30 November 15, 2020**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew chapter 25 here re-reading these words. “He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 Stewardship Sunday was two weeks ago, and yet here we are faced with probably the most recognizable stewardship parable in the entire Bible. The parable of the talents speaks about proper investment of the money that God has given to you. It speaks about how to properly use your time in the moments before God returns in Judgment, which is why this text appears on the second to last Sunday of the entire Church Year. The word “talent” is literally in the title of the parable and it isn’t a huge stretch to take this from a parable about proper investment of money to proper investment of talent, as in God given abilities, as in God given intellect. It is all there. Treasures, Time, and Talents. It’s served up on a nice platter that any pastor loves to see because it makes our job so easy. But, this isn’t Stewardship Sunday. I could have just as easily manipulated the texts so that this particular one swapped spots with the text from November 1st, but there’s more here. So, we won’t be talking about Treasures. We won’t be talking about Time. We won’t even be talking about Talents. But we will be talking about stewardship. We are stewards of all those things and we should be proper stewards of all that God has given us which is what this parable so perfectly illustrates to us in our lives as Christians and God’s children. But rather than looking at the similar themes that come out of this rather straightforward parable, let’s take a look at another thing we are stewards of in our lives, and how we squander and are poor stewards of this gift. The gift I’m talking about is knowledge.

 Look again at the text, particularly the longer section that we heard read at the end of the parable. What does the last servant say? The one with only one talent? We can point to his laziness, his slothfulness, his lack of motivation, that’s usually what we talk about. Go servant! Go and do! Don’t sit and do nothing! That’s not being a good steward! And it’s 100% true. Slothfulness is called out specifically by the master who in this parable is God, the one who entrusts, the one who gives and invests in us to invest what He has given us to the furthering of His kingdom, this is all true. In our Old Testament lesson we find in the rare words of Zephaniah 1:12, “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.” Complacency is called out in full force and we are as guilty as anyone else of being sloths and lazy instruments that God uses for a holy and righteous purpose.

 But what is the complacency tied to? What is our slothfulness and lack of enthusiasm about? Is it the talents? The treasures? The time? Certainly. But what about the knowledge? This servant knows the master, he says so himself! “I knew you to be a hard man.” Do we not know God? Has God not revealed himself to us in His Holy Word?

 Psalm chapter 98, “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.” 1 Peter 1:17-19, “Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. *For you know* that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” And finally, Proverbs chapter 1:7, truly the summary passage of the entire book, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

 What does this mean? In terms of stewardship it’s to say that you are blessed with many and various things, from time to treasures, to talents, to truly everything you own, and included in that is the blessings of knowledge of the one true, trinitarian, all powerful, all knowing, all holy, all present God. And you know what God has said, and you know what God has done. It has been invested into you, just as the talents in the servants, this knowledge has been given to you and revealed to you by the work of God himself in the Holy Spirit creating and sustaining faith in your heart as a Christian to know the truth that will set you free from sin death and the devil in a world of sin and death and where the devil prowls to steal, hurt, maim, and destroy souls, tempting them to deny Christ and choose to suffer in hell for all eternity. You know the truth! You have been taught the truth, catechized in this truth, you have the very Word of God at your disposal in many and various ways, in your own language, and as we joyfully observed this past Tuesday in Bible Study, even in various translations and versions to make it as clear as crystal for you.

 Yet the indictment against the servant, who squanders the gift of one talent, is slothfulness, and complacency, and laziness. And so it is for us. We know. We know what God has said concerning sin. We know what God has said concerning what he has blessed us with. We know. And yet what is this servant’s failure? He knew what kind of master he had. He knew what his master expected of him to be doing with what was entrusted to him. And yet he does. Nothing. My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ. You know God. You are in His house. You are surrounded by those who know him as well. You see images and symbols, and crosses, and pictures, and other revelations and you make the connection of what they mean. You have been taught. You know. And yet you do….nothing. Nothing for your erring neighbor, or family member, or brother or sister who lives in open rejection, who lives in blissful ignorance of the destruction that lies ahead for them in their unbelief. You do nothing. It is the temptation of this servant, the one he gave in to, the same as we find in Zephaniah. We lie to ourselves. We do nothing. We stay comfortable. “The Lord will do not do good, nor will he do ill.” We lie to ourselves. God won’t do anything. Yet we know. We know God, we have been blessed and entrusted with that knowledge. We are stewards of that knowledge of His Word through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. How can we do nothing? How can we hide this knowledge of the truth in the dirt of this world and do nothing with what God has given us?

 Complacency. Laziness. Slothfulness. These are the temptations of the evil one. Faithfulness, service, and joy. These are the gifts that God gives us. The most important aspect of the parable of the talents when it comes to proper stewardship, is that it’s never quantified in the application to our lives. What this means is that it’s never about the amount. The first steward with 5, turns it into 10, but that doesn’t really matter. It’s not about the number 10 or that sort of growth. The one who is given 2 turns it into 4. That too is a blessing, but in the end, the actual number doesn’t matter. The joy is the same for each servant. The same words are used by the master in talking to both servants. “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.” Why are we faithful stewards? The answer is found right there. For the joy of our master. For the joy of the one who has given us everything from the shoes on our feet, to the money in the bank, to the food on our table, to the knowledge in our heads, to the faith in our heart. He gives it all. He is joyful in the gifts He gives to us and expects nothing in return. Salvation isn’t earned through a proper investing and return, that’s not how it works. You don’t have to hit a quota in order to be saved. You don’t have to put in a specific number of hours or activities based on time or talents you have. That’s not how it works! That’s not how scripture reveals our lives as God’s children. It reveals a life of service, but one that’s full of joy. Joy in the master for how we use his gifts, joy in our hearts in being able to serve the Lord.

 It’s not about the quantity, or the influence, or the amount. It’s something we get to do. We get to serve. We get to serve in the shadow of the Savior who came as a servant, and died for his servants, so that his servants wouldn’t have to fear the servants of death but instead would become servants of life. You are blessed with the knowledge of that. You are given that knowledge of God. A God who loves you. So in our neglect, in our sin, in our complacency, know that here in God’s house, you are forgiven. You are restored. You are made right again. You are equipped with more knowledge, like a cup that overflows with knowledge of God and His gifts. You are His very own forever and nothing can change that, no matter what you do or fail to do. But God has called you and given you a purpose here in this life. Not to do nothing. Not to bury the gifts He has blessed you with. But to serve in joy and gladness, in a spirit of thanksgiving. Knowing that He is with you every step of the way. Knowing that He gives the words, and the motivation, and he works in the hearts of cold hardened, stubborn individuals, to hear His Word and receive his gifts. God be with you here as we meditate upon his truths at the end of a trying and strange Church Year. Next week will be our final Sunday in the Church Year before we move forward to a season of preparation. God bless and keep you.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.