**Nov. 19, 2023 Pentecost 25 2023**

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**Dearly Beloved one of God, grace mercy and peace to you from God our creator and our savior Jesus Christ. AMEN**

**Let’s start today by defining a major part of this reading. What is a talent?**

**You need to know that a talent in Greek is a sum of money that is gigantic.**

**To have this sum of money I suppose would put you in the 1%**

**that we hear about in the news.**

**It could also be the entire sum of your life’s work,**

**whatever that ends up totaling.**

**But we also have to look at a talent this way:**

**the talent is an enormous sum that, though it has been given for us to use,**

**it still belongs to the Master.**

**It is the vast gift the master gives to each of his servants.**

**So what enormous sum has the Master given to you?**

**It could literally be a talent, a spiritual gift that you have received from God,**

**something that you are talented at.**

**Isn’t it cool to think that your spiritual gift is considered a fortune by God?**

**So each servant gets talents, each gets something that belongs to the Master.**

**What I am so drawn to in this reading though**

**is the response of each of the recipients of the talents.**

**And particularly, the contrast between the first two servants and the last one.**

**We only realize that after the master has returned.**

**The first two get this amazing possession and without a second thought**

**just start to use their great gifts.**

**They apparently did not anguish or wonder**

**about the Master when they received this gift!**

**They just joyfully lived in this gift the Master gave them.**

**The third servant reacted very differently to the gift of talents.**

**Instead of receiving with open arms what the Master has given,**

**this servant demonstrates quite a different process.**

**There was an anguished head game going on with him**

**that began with questions and debate about what the master is like**

**that caused him look suspiciously on what the Master had given him.**

**So when the Master shows up again,**

**whew do we get a front seat vantage point to hear what has been spinning**

**in this guy’s mind for all these years.**

**“Master I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow,**

**and gathering where you did not scatter seed;**

**So I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.**

**Here, you have what is yours.”**

**What do you think about this?**

**Do you respond like this third servant sometimes?**

**I’d love to hear your reaction to that third servant’s opinion**

**because we know this story is all about God, God is the master of this story.**

**(ask the congregation; after hearing what they have to say, integrate some of their responses)**

**This guy had the same gifts, the same homeplace as the other two servants,**

**just a different reaction to it all.**

**Martin Luther wrote about God saying:**

**God’s nature is nothing else than pure love.**

**He is not a god of wrath and anger but only of Grace.**

**The wrath of God appears to be a figment of man’s imagination.**

**Man sees not the true god but an idol—not God as God is,**

**only a dark cloud covering God’s face. This cloud, however, exists in man’s heart**

**and is therefore not objectively but only subjectively present.**

**It exists only in the false thinking about God.”**

**So a thought, a belief about God and the gifts that God gives,**

**a thought separated this third servant from joy.**

**And this belief about God creates the reality the third servant is living in.**

**Because the oddest thing?**

**He does receive exactly what he expected from this harsh man**

**who lived in his head.**

**He’s thrown into the outer darkness, where he has been living his whole life.**

**What he expected from the master? It is what he got!**

**This man had the gifts and possessions, the love and joy of the Master**

**and he lived as if none of that was true.**

**And with that thought, that false belief, essentially,**

**he didn’t have any of the enormous abundance of God .**

**God’s love and gifts and joy were buried in his life, so they were taken from him.**

**He got from the master what he expected to get based on nothing**

**but wrong ideas about his master.**

**So what do we think God is like?**

**What do we think God wants for us in our lives?**

**And do we have thoughts about God that keep us from what God really has in mind for us?**

**What thoughts about God being harsh or demanding**

**Have kept you from recognizing the abundance of all things that**

**God has for you and fo our congregation?**

**And if you are like this third servant in any way, maybe we have to ask ourselves**

**What part is joy supposed to play in our lives?**

**After the first two servants show what they’ve been up to,**

**the master does not say “who do you think you are?”**

**He says instead “enter into the joy of your master.”**

**One translation even says:**

**Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner!**

**Joy, partnership with God, that is the goal of what God wants for us,**

**and for our congregation.**

**I don’t know about you, but most of my life I’ve felt that to be joyful,**

**to even just seek happiness is a little—I don’t know—childish, or naïve.**

**Or worse, it is selfish. Like it wasn’t what God wanted for me.**

**It feels that if I am seeking joy, I am forgetting all the suffering in the world.**

**I am ignoring people’s pain. My internal script is only that**

**God wants an obedient dutiful daughter that follows the rules**

**and falls into line, doing what is expected.**

**But with duty, there is very little room for joy.**

**And duty actually breeds a lot of resentment in us against other people**

**who seem to live in joy!**

**One author put it this way:**

**“There was a time when I thought small-scale enjoyment in a world**

**so filled with suffering was a crime in itself.**

**It was hard to take a bite of my overabundant food, to hug my healthy children,**

**or to drive one fossil-fuel mile without pangs of guilt.**

**The only moral thing to do, I believed, was to sustain an attentive misery,**

**honoring the pain and danger in this world.**

**But over the years, as I’ve seen what leads to positive change and what doesn’t,**

**I’ve become sort of a joy hound. To live in joy, to accept gladness,**

**we must stop believing that we can be sad enough to make a sad person happy.”**

**Instead, like the two servants who joyfully played with what came to them**

**from the hand of their master, we too can enter into the joy of the master.**

**They didn’t fret about what their master was like.**

**Or like Luther, they didn’t make an idol out of an idea about an angry or forbidding God who will be disappointed in us.**

**We could live in joy, be joy hounds, knowing God is there with us.**

**When we use our talents, when we are what God has created us to be,**

**We are joy-full. We love it. Life feels good and it feels like play to us.**

**If you are not in a place like this, ask someone who loves their job**

**or their place in life.**

**They usually say that it makes them feel alive when they are using their gifts.**

**I served on the board of directors of a non profit**

**with another member who is a CPA.**

**She was talking about her work on the board,**

**that she would take home her work,**

**turn on her computer, pull up the financials and hours could go by**

**without her even registering the “Work” that she was doing. It’s fun for her.**

**It’s her God given talent and it brings not only joy to her, but joy to the world.**

**I know we as board members loved her joyful work.**

**So for us to see God rightly, full of love and grace, as Luther said,**

**leads us to follow God rightly,**

**knowing that entering into partnership with God is the invitation to us.**

**When we use the gifts God has given us, we enter into the flow of God,**

**and we receive and give joy with that.**

**To think we need to focus only on duty, or fear of God,**

**or only look at the tragedies in the world,**

**worrying that to have joy, we are disobeying or dishonoring God …**

**well that’s a 3rd servant understanding of the world,**

**who has not really looked consciously at their thoughts,**

**just assuming that with harshness of life, God must be harsh too.**

**No—instead, we can choose joy, cultivate it, seek it out.**

**knowing that as we do, we get closer to the real heart of God!**

**Our hearts are healed and then we become good for the world!**

**And then there is the strange and beautiful reality that**

**From those who have nothing even what they have will be taken away.**

**But for those who have, more will be given.**

**And they will have in abundance oh and more importantly?**

**They will have joy. AMEN**