

24th Sunday After **PENTECOST**



Prayers

Almighty Father, as the great day of the Lord draws ever nearer, when Your Son will return to judge the living and the dead, we pray that You would grant Your people to remain faithful to the end. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

(Proper 28)

Collect of the Day

Almighty and ever-living God, You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. Dispel from us the works of darkness and grant us to live in the light of Your Son, Jesus Christ, that our faith may never be found wanting; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 90:1-12
(antiphon v. 17)
Zephaniah 1:7-16
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Matthew 25:14-30

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 508
Other Hymns – 613 (OT), 659 (E),
663 (E), 783 (G), 730

Gracious Lord, though we do not know the day or hour of Your Son's appearing, grant that we would always be prepared by sending us faithful pastors and teachers who will boldly proclaim Your Word of Law and Gospel to us, that we may be constantly encouraged and built up in the faith. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Lord God, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, help us always to be good and faithful servants who are diligent stewards of all that You so graciously provide. Especially grant us to be generous in speaking of the salvation that You provide for all through Your Son. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Everlasting Father, You have given us the gift of Your creation, and though this world is passing away due to sin, we pray that You would preserve it for our use and provision until You usher in the new creation to come. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Merciful Lord, we pray that You would grant healing and relief to all who are afflicted in mind, body or soul [especially _____]. Give them the peace and comfort that only comes through Christ. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Blessed Lord, we give thanks to You for all the faithful departed. Grant comfort to all who mourn, [including _____], that they may find peace and hope in the resurrection of the dead. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST SERMON

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST NOVEMBER 15 2020

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:14-30

'Good And Faithful Servants'

As the earthly life and work of Jesus is winding down, He tells us how this earth and life will wind down. In the chapters leading up to where we are at today, He has sketched out the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation; and to this He added the account of His return on the clouds with power and great glory. And then, He gives us some parables.

Last week Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins with oil and lamps, and the arrival of the Bridegroom to take home His Bride. And in that parable there is a lot of waiting. And, while many fear that day – the day of judgment; Jesus describes it as a day of joy, the start of the wedding feast that has no end.

In spite of the fact that we do not like waiting, there is a lot of waiting in the Bible. In fact, the Bible is really all about waiting. Abraham waited 25 years for a son. Israel waited in Egypt 430 years to be freed from slavery. They then waited 40 years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. The whole Old Testament is about waiting for the promised Saviour to come, and the New Testament is about waiting for that same Saviour to come again. And we are now waiting. And we don't like waiting.

And so, here's the question of the day. What do we do until then? How do we, who do not like waiting, wait for that day?

Jesus answers by telling us another parable about His return on the last day. A master returns home from his travels after entrusting his servants with his property. A wicked and lazy servant is cast into outer darkness. There is weeping and gnashing of teeth, as he reaps the rewards for his unfaithfulness. So, there it is. A little story, a little parable about what exactly? Remember, parables are always tricky business. And what is this one about?

Now, as with many of Jesus' parables, this one, too, is about Jesus – about faith and unbelief in Jesus. Jesus uses things that are seen to speak of that which is unseen. He uses things we can place our hands on to speak of that which we cannot touch. In the end, it is all about Jesus . . . His doing, His working for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of our souls.

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his own servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability. Then he went away.”

The man is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. He has completed His work of the redemption of the world, and now has ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. But before He ascended into heaven, Jesus gave the church His gifts of salvation. And so it is that just before His departure Jesus says to the disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” And again He says: “Take eat, this is my body given for you. Take drink, this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.” And further He says: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

The apostle Peter puts it this way, “And [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

There it is. These are the gifts that Jesus gave to the church – His gifts of salvation. These are the talents in the parable. We know them as the Word and Sacraments, the means of grace. The riches of God's kingdom which deliver the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation to people of all times and in all places. Oh, they don't look like much on the outside. Plain, ordinary looking water; a bit of stale bread and cheap wine; simple words. And yet, they are God's ways of delivering to people His grace and His mercy . . . His Holy Spirit working in and through them and capable of gaining eternal, heavenly rewards when put to faithful use.

“He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents, made two talents more.” And what's the point? Just this: the church that during this time of wait-

ing uses the talents which it has been given will see those talents reap rewards. In other words, the church that faithfully makes use of Word and Sacrament will see that Word and those Sacraments bear fruit. So God Himself has promised, “My Word shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

But how is that going? There doesn't seem to be long lines of people waiting to come through church doors on a Sunday morning these days, does there? And as a result, we get discouraged and, with the result, that we do not trust that which the Lord has given us – His Word and the Sacraments. Forgetting the truth of which we read in our Lutheran Confessions; that “the Holy Spirit works faith when and where He pleases in those who hear the Gospel.”

“But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money.” And then what? Not abiding by and with what God has said about His Word and the Sacraments; many there are these days who bury those heavenly treasures in the ground . . . and instead have opted for methods, programs, techniques – all nicely re-wrapped and re-marketed to supposedly appeal to people. But in the end, when the master returns, they will have to answer for their faithlessness, and there will be hell to pay! As Jesus says, “Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Now, there is something about this parable that you may not have thought about before. Is not Jesus the wicked and slothful servant . . . made that way for us? He, after all, took upon Himself all our wickedness and slothfulness, all the misuse of our talents and the faithlessness which we inherited from Adam. And He took it all to the cross. And there He was forsaken, cast into the outer darkness in our place, cut off from God on account of our sins. There He wept and gnashed His teeth for us, enduring the fullness of hell in our place. And when He did so, it was finished. His work was done – sin fully paid for, death overcome, and a new life given to us through those talents, those treasures, which He entrusted to His church for all time – His Word faithfully preached, and the Sacraments rightly administered.

And so, we wait, and we wait some more, for our risen and ascended Lord to return in great power and might. We wait patiently, expectantly, and joyfully for His return. And we do so because of those talents, those gifts, those means of grace – the Word and the Sacraments which He has given to His church to use during these last days.

To be sure, such churches like this will probably not be the 'happening' church in town. They are a little too old fashioned, not very progressive in their thinking and style, looked upon with a little disdain, perhaps seen like the village idiots. And yet, when the Lord Jesus comes we have His own promise that He will then say to us these words, "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." Amen.