

The Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:14-30

Honestly, I have struggled to understand this parable. There are many different interpretations if you were to investigate.

Jesus is using this parable to describe the kingdom of heaven. He leaves us to interpret the parable's meaning though.

This parable seems to say that we are required to perform, to be wise stewards of the gifts or talents we are given or else! We will be assessed it seems at the end. The steward who feared his master and buried his talent is punished...left with nothing and banished to the outer darkness!!! This does not jive with our Lord's other teachings...he says 'the last shall be first and the first last'... our Lord came to save sinners, the sick, the lonely the outcast. He ate with outcasts and sinners.

We all know the hymn 'Amazing Grace' and we love it...we grasp onto its words. 'Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost and now I'm found, was blind but now I see.' Do we love it because we need to be reminded over and over that we are saved by God's Grace. Our Lord gave himself for us...a once and for all offering...a self offering ...to make us right with our Father. So we have not earned this state of grace. No way is grace earned...it is free gift.

We preachers need to again and again proclaim the real good news that in Christ, we are all saved by grace. If we are in Christ, then what God will say to us at the end of our days is not a concern and does not depend on whatever grade we achieved on the Report Card of life.

But I suspect that many of us have a nagging inner suspicion that we are not good enough. Does this lead us to do good deeds out of guilt and a yearning to earn God's approval?

One way to understanding is to compare Christian Life to grabbing an inner tube and jumping into an already flowing river. Yes, we are saved by Grace alone, but we are invited to jump into the river. It has been created independently of ourselves. It follows its own course. It will flow on even if we decide to hop out. What we do is to participate in this flowing river of grace. We can guide our inner tube, avoiding rocks and overhanging branches. We can greet others along the way. We may have to maneuver some tricky rapids or even waterfalls...but we participate in this rushing river of grace and there is joy. All we do is only possible because God is present and over all...we are flowing along with God.

In the Parable of the Talents, although the third servant missed it, the very giving of the talents was a divinely initiated act of grace. Even one talent was a huge amount of money...one talent was equal to sixteen years of wages. So each gift was a very large gift of grace. What fuels grace is love. Love is the reason why God showers us with Grace, most of all in the gift of his Son. The downfall of the third servant was his fear, his belief that God was harsh. He was paralysed by his fear, burying his talent...playing extra safe and hiding it. How miserable he must have been.

We are invited rather, to jump into the river of Grace which is this life and to be as Paul says, fellow workers with God to bring about Shalom...the redeemed world. When we have children, we 'procreate', we participate in the mystery of new life. When we love others, we further God's purposes for God IS love. Even when we smile, when we laugh and when we include the outsider, the one unable to be here...we are God's ambassadors...making God smile.

We demonstrate that we understand the Lord's joy mentioned in the parable when we throw ourselves into Christian living wholeheartedly. The motivation for getting busy with our talents is not fear and not guilt but the very joy with which those talents were handed out in the first place! And it's not a matter of what we do versus what God does but is a matter of our cooperating with God by participating with God in his great program of cosmic restoration!

The great violinist, Niccolo Paganini willed his marvelous violin to the city of Genoa when he died in 1840. The extremely valuable violin is played from time to time by winners of violin competitions. Mr. Accardo, after he had played it, said that Genoan officials are wise to permit the violin's use. "A good violin should be played as much as possible," he said. "The more you play it, the better it sounds. It is something alive, something made to be played. It is something that must be played."

So exactly with Christians...we are alive and meant to make music in concert with our Lord. The more we play, the better we sound. So let us begin the music.

