

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The end times theme continues in the parable in today's Gospel, as it follows immediately after last week's Parable of the Ten Virgins. Today's parable is often called the Parable of the Talents.

You recall, Jesus told us what the point of last week's parable was: "*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour*" (Matt. 25:13). Immediately after He said this, Jesus continued by saying, "*for it will be just as a man going on a trip ...*" You can hear ... Jesus is explaining a bit more about our preparedness.

The parable is simple. A man calls his servants to him and divides up his possessions. To one, he gave five talents; to a second, he gave two talents; and to a third, he gave one talent. All of these are significant sums. Even if they're different, it was all fair. He gave to each according to his ability — his ability to put the talents to work.

A quick aside: although it may sound like Karl Marx's communist principle, it's not the same. Marx promoted: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (wikipedia); here Jesus says "*TO EACH according to his ability,*" and He encourages the servants to be at work with His possessions.

The man went away for a long time, and indeed, the first two servants did take the money and put it to work, earning more, each one doubling what the master had given them. The final servant, on the other hand, the one who had received one talent, buried the money in the ground.

The man, their master, returned after a long time and settled accounts. The first two servants He commended. "*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.*" The same commendation was given for both of them.

How different the third servant, the one who buried the master's money. He was called "*wicked and slothful.*" The master scolded this servant, took back the money and gave it to the servant with ten talents. He cast the wicked servant out into the outer darkness, to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We might wonder why such harsh treatment? Was it simply because he had buried the money? I think not. Rather, we can see that burying the money was but a fruit of his attitude with regard to the master. He only feared the master; there was no love or trust. He considered him a hard man, reaping when he hadn't sown, gathering where he had not scattered, not kind and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

If you read the October "Voice of Zion," you might recall that Luther's attitude toward God was one of fear and even hatred. It was fear that caused him to become

a monk, and it was hatred that kept Luther from entering “*into the joy of [his] master.*”

This was even after nailing his 95 theses to the Castle church door. In Luther’s so-called “Tower Experience,” it was almost shocking to hear Luther talk about how he “hated the word ‘righteousness of God,’ because he thought it meant the “righteousness according to which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unjust.” He said, “Not only did I not love, but I actually hated the righteous God who punishes sinners.” Jesus was that hard master who reaped where he did not sow and gathered where he did not scatter. Luther feared and hated Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit instructed him by God’s word, and Luther “began to understand that the righteousness of God is a gift of God by which a righteous man lives, namely [by] faith” and “that the merciful God justifies us by faith.” Then, he said, he “felt as though [he] had been reborn altogether and had entered Paradise” ([lutheranreformation.org/theology/luthers-breakthrough-romans/](http://lutheranreformation.org/theology/luthers-breakthrough-romans/)).

It was then that Luther truly put the five talents God had given him to work. Then, he had the courage to stand before kings and confess the Gospel even at risk of his own life. Then, he had the fortitude to spur on the restoration of the Gospel to the church. In the end, Luther knew that an accounting was still before him. He wrote, “I am certain that one day I must die and at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ must render an account of the truth — whether I have kept it silent or have spoken it — and in general of the talent entrusted to me [I might say five talents], lest I be declared guilty of having hidden it (Matt. 25:26-30). Let those who want to rage do so by all means. Only let me not be found guilty of impious silence” (*Luther’s Works*, 27:159). The master’s words surely apply to Luther: “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*”

A second example was brought to mind this past week. You recall that we have prayed for the Finnish Minister of Parliament, Päivi Räsänen, and the Lutheran bishop in Finland, Juhana Pohjola, who were being prosecuted for hate speech for speaking the truth of God’s word regarding marriage. For five years they have fought an overzealous prosecutor seeking to make an example of them and seeking to silence them and others who might want to speak out for the truth of God’s design for man and woman. The pair had won in an Helsinki District Court, but now they have won in the Court of Appeals.

Mrs. Räsänen and Bishop Pohjola both were stalwart defenders of the truth, freedom, and the Gospel. Both spoke out after the decision. Bishop Pohjola said this: “I see that in the midst of all of this [ponderous legal process], God is good. We have been able to hold forth the central teachings of the Bible about the good gifts of creation, the seriousness of sin and the grace of Christ Jesus. While the basic teachings of Christianity are increasingly challenged and opposed in our time, we

need not cower in fear and remain silent. We can continue to teach both the inalienable human dignity of every human being as God's creation and the marital and familial life that God intended, as well as the new life brought by Christ in the midst of our human brokenness."

They, too, have done well with the five talents given them. They stood up courageously against the power of the state and won. To be sure, the case could still be appealed to the Finnish Supreme Court. But they are willing to fight on, and they serve as examples to us: "*Well done, good and faithful servants.*"

Christian friends, our Christian life may not be so eventful as these; that's okay. We may not have been entrusted with five talents; perhaps it's only two, for the fact is, as He has ascended to the Father's right hand, that we also have been entrusted with the Lord's possessions. How are we using them? For the benefit of the kingdom? Or are we hiding them in the ground?

It's a question to ask today as we think on our kingdom work and make our pledges. And we should think not just about our treasures ... "ALL THAT WE HAVE is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee" (LSB781:1). What we have is God's but He wants us to put them to work. Are we? Are we trusting that the Lord will take care of us as we use His talents for the good of His kingdom? Or are we faithlessly fearing a hard, taskmaster and judge?

The number of talents is not important. What is important is — do we trust in the master, in His goodness, in His redemption, in His victory? Do we trust in Him and will we respond in obedience?

So, whether you've returned your pledge cards yet or not, I encourage you to ponder your master, the blessed salvation He won for you, and the talents He has entrusted to you; and I pray that you will respond as all of His good and faithful servants do, that in due time you may hear His commendation, *Well done,*" and His invitation: "*Enter into the joy of your master.*"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.