

KINGDOM INVESTMENTS©**Matthew 25:14-30****November 16, 2014****Rev. Sharlyn Gates**

Last week's sermon was titled "The In-Between Time" but I think today's sermon could have been titled, "The In-Between Time, Part 2."

This parable in Matthew continues the theme of Jesus' return and what disciples should be doing in that "In-Between Time." While we wait – and it certainly has turned into a long wait – we are to be doing something.

Last week, we learned we are to be preparing, we should be always ready for the coming of Christ. This week, we hear about 3 slaves who were entrusted with money from their master – the landowner. We hear about what these slaves did with that money and the reaction of the master when he returns.

It is about the slaves and their activity, but it is as much about the landowner as it is the slaves. Or, at least it is about the perception of those slaves – how they perceived the master seemed to influence how they treated the money they were given.

In those days, a talent was equal to about 6,000 denarii. A denarii was a common laborer's daily wage. So, a talent would be roughly equivalent to 20 years worth of wages for an average worker.

Five talents then, which was the largest amount given to one of the three slaves, would be around 100 years worth of labor ... a huge amount of money!

In those days there were different levels of servants or slaves and these three must have been on a high level. They were given a great deal of trust by the landowner who had to go away on a trip. Jesus says they were given amounts of money according to their ability – I guess that would be according to what they had demonstrated that they were capable of accomplishing.

You heard the story. The landowner was delayed. He didn't come back as soon as they thought he would. And, since he was a long time coming back, they might have decided he wasn't returning at all. They could take the money and run. Or, they could use it for something that would give them pleasure, or at least, make their job easier.

But they did not do that. None of them took the money for themselves. They were trustworthy to the end. And the master, the landowner, did eventually return.

He asked each of them what they had done with what he had given them. The first one, whom he had given five talents, had invested it and made five more. He had increased the value by five. Imagine how much more money that was! He was giving back to the

landowner what was he had originally given him, plus another 100 years worth of wages.

The second servant was given two talents and he had doubled the money. He was giving back twice the amount.

The landowner was quite pleased with them both. He had trusted them to do something wise with what was his own and they had valued his trust and were proven to be trustworthy.

The third slave was given just one talent. That may not seem like much, but remember, one talent was equivalent to about 20 years worth of wages. Just one talent was a lot of money to be trusted with!

And if the landowner gave to this slave what he believed his ability was, then he must have seen some great potential in him, yet maybe he was still learning and growing, thus he did not receive as much as the others, who apparently had proven their ability before, with other things.

When the landowner asked this slave what he had done with the money he was trusted with, the slave replied, "Well, Master, I knew you were a hard man, you take things that aren't yours, you cheat people out of what is theirs. I was afraid of you, so I buried that money to keep it safe. It's all there. See? Every penny you gave me I give back to you." The master was furious with him. He asked, "So you think you know me? You know that I am a harsh man, a cheater?" At least you could have kept it safe in a bank where it might have drawn a little interest.

So what do we make of this? Do we continue with the metaphors – saying God is the Master, the Landowner and we are the servants, entrusted with things God has given to us – according to our ability?

If that is true – and I think it is – then we need to work out this description of the master – that he was a harsh man, who did mean and unfair things to others.

I'd like to take a moment to ask you to tell me what you think God is like. Just a word or a sentence that describes God, as you know God.

(Love, full of mercy, forgiving, just, sacrificial, unconditional grace ...)

Think a minute about the God who sent His Son, Jesus. God, who came to us in Jesus. Whose own Son died on a cruel cross so that we might have forgiveness of sins, so that we might know his mercy and love. This is God who showers us with gifts and blessings and grace – grace being given with nothing to do but love God.

The other slaves did not comment on the master being harsh. In fact, they trusted the master enough to take some risks with what belonged to the master. They cared

enough for the master that they were willing to exert some wisdom and energy on decisions that could have lost, but ended up growing, what was given.

It seems like the third slave was living out of fear. His perception of the master was all he could see and he lived his life accordingly. He was afraid to take any risks; afraid to trust the master enough to step out of his comfort zone for the sake of what the master might gain.

We too can choose to know our Master – God – as a God of judgment and wrath and vengeance and we too can live out of a lack of trust and fear of taking risks with what God has given us.

We can be afraid to give any more of ourselves or the gifts God has given to us; afraid we will lose them; afraid of trusting the one who has given us everything.

Or, we can act with great joy as we realize that all the gifts we have – our income, our energy, our abilities, our talents (which are not the same as those talents in the Bible) – all those things are given by God for God’s purpose. In fact all those things, all of it – including our whole life – belongs to God, in the first place.

As is stated in the great Heidelberg Catechism, the question is:

Q. 1. What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

A. That I belong--body and soul, in life and in death--not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation.

Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

We are entrusted servants – stewards of what belongs to God.

Everything belongs to Him. We are trusted to not only take care of what he has given us but to use it wisely and to do something with it that will enhance his Kingdom.

We give our time to help others, to work in the church, to take care of the property, to serve in the community as a volunteer – not just because we are nice people; not just because we want to keep something good going but because it is important to the master – the one who owns it all. It is important that we work to make things better in God’s world.

When we give a portion of our income we are trusting God; we are risking giving back something that we might need. Yet, we are so crazy about this Master who is crazy about us and we are thankful that he trusts us with his own property. So we give.

We give out of love; we give out of a deep place of trust; we give out of an incredible sense of gratitude; we give because we want to see growth, we want to enhance the ministries that Jesus began. We are investing in the Kingdom of God in that “In-Between Time” – as we wait for our Master, Jesus, to return.

In a few minutes we will have the opportunity to bring our regular offerings up and put in the offering plate and we can also place our pledge cards in the basket here at the foot of the cross.

We will do it in silence as we come and I encourage you to do it in prayer, thanking God for whatever you can give, whatever you have decided to do, and asking God to bless that commitment and help you to trust that He will take care of you.

Our song, “Take My Life” is one we will sing throughout the rest of this service. I invite you stand as we sing the first three verses and to think of what you are singing. This is a song of commitment and love to a God who has first loved us. Please turn now to page number 391. Let us stand and sing.

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