

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
October 2, 2011**

“Different Gifts, Same Grace” – Week 1

Matthew 25:14-30

You Are a Gifted Servant!

1. *What grace that God gives gifts*
2. *What joy we have in using them*

**Hymns: 229 – 491 – Distribution: 481, 309 –
469**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Matthew 25:14-30 –

¹⁴ *“It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.*

¹⁹ *“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

²² *“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted*

me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

²⁴ *“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?*

²⁷ *Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

²⁸ *“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

**“Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: ‘It might have
been!’ ”**

Those words were penned by American poet John Greenleaf Whittier in the 1800’s. He identified the saddest words in the English language as: “It might have been.” In the poem, he mentions that people of any station of life – great or small – can think back on their youth and say these words: “It might have been.”

We may not know exactly what he had in mind when he first wrote those words, but we understand his point: What a sad thing to see wasted talent, wasted resources, wasted opportunities!

- Have you ever known a fellow student that could be said of? One who was bright and brilliant, but squandered their potential with a lack of applying themselves to their studies?
- Have you ever known that to be true of a musician? One who had a great start and showed early promise in their abilities at the piano or on an instrument, but in the end they threw it all away because they didn't practice or they pursued more trivial things?
- Have you ever seen it in an athlete, one who has God-given strength and speed, but by bad stewardship of their body or by their own laziness squandered their chance at achievement?

“It might have been...”

Christian, can we say this about you? I'm not talking about the way you used (or didn't use) your talents in your youth or in school. I'm talking about how you use your talents as a Christian in the world and in God's Church. Unfortunately, the phrase “It might have been” can apply to many Christians.

We are beginning a four-week service series today that our Wisconsin Synod has provided to all of our congregations under its four-year motto **“Christ's Love, Our Calling.”** This service series focuses mainly on our use of God-

given talents. This year's series is called **“Different Gifts, Same Grace.”** As we focus on the first message in this series, we learn from Jesus' Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. Today we learn from Jesus: **You Are a Gifted Servant!**

- 1. What grace that God gives gifts**
- 2. What joy you have in using them**

May this service series lead us to a greater appreciation and use of our God-given talents!

1 – Jesus' parable began: *“It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”* When Jesus spoke those words, he was three days away from his suffering and death. He would soon be leaving his disciples. He wanted them to be ready for the days to come. He wanted them to understand that God richly blesses his followers with gifts to use wisely and urgently. This parable is an illustration of his point.

He pictures his departure from this world as a master leaving his servants and giving them a trust to work with until he returns. We see some interesting points in how this master gives his gifts to his servants:

First, we see that the master was gracious. Were these servants deserving of his gifts? Did he have to give these talents? Absolutely not! Yet he gives them the opportunity to work profitably for him in trust. This was an honor and a privilege for them.

Secondly, we see that this master was generous. With the numbers Jesus uses in this parable, this master is obviously a rich man. A “talent” in ancient times was originally a measurement of weight, and then came to be known as a unit of money. A talent was worth about 6000 days’ wages. This was no small amount that he was entrusting to these servants!

Thirdly, we see that this master was considerate. We see this because he gave a different amount of his money to the different servants. Jesus says this money was given to “*each according to his ability.*” It was based on their ability to use and take care of his wealth. He didn’t load them with more than they could handle.

This master gives with the intention of giving more one day. He is eager for them to succeed in their investment into his work and has rewards to give them for their faithfulness. With joy he wants to praise them with a “Well done, good and faithful servant!” when he returns. He eagerly wants to say one day, “Come and share your master’s happiness!”

Are you a “gifted” person? We use that term in a specific way nowadays when referring to people. It’s quite a compliment to say, “That person is a gifted person” or “That’s a gifted child.”

Are you a “gifted” person? We see in Jesus’ parable that you are! How is this true? Let’s review what God has given you. We see many similarities between God and the master of the parable:

1. First and foremost, God has been gracious by calling you to be his child. Did you deserve this? Sometimes a parent will get fed

up and frustrated with how a child is behaving. Perhaps it’s a day when their sassy voice is alive and well. Maybe their treatment of their brothers and sisters is unkind and mean. They are being impossible! A parent might feel like saying to them, “Who are you? I never taught you to act like this. You’re not acting like my child!”

Do you deserve to be God’s child? You do not! Your sinful nature has its own agenda and goals. Your behavior has not been kind and Christian. You have been an unruly and sinful child of your Maker in heaven. God could well look at you and say, “Who are you? I never taught you to act like this. You are not my child!”

Yet God in his grace has gifted you with the honor and privilege of being his son or daughter. He sent a Savior to die for your sins. He called you through baptism to faith and forgiveness. He has converted you. He offers you his Supper for the forgiveness of sins. He speaks to you through his Word. He has given our church pastors and teachers to lead our congregation and serve you spiritually. He has given us freedom in our nation to worship him in safety. What blessings!

2. Secondly, he has blessed us generously. When we look at the talents and gifts he has given to us, we must admit how unworthy we are to have such great things. I think the best way to consider

this is to think of the people in our congregation. What talents do you see in yourself and in our membership?

- Champion pray-ers
- Musicians
- Leaders
- Lay teachers
- Financial matters
- Outreach
- Maintenance
- Caring for and loving children
- Technology

Do we deserve to have these talents? When you think of the people of our congregation – yourself included – how generously God has gifted us!

3. Thirdly, God has blessed us differently. This is an important point. Think about a volleyball team for a moment. If you know anything about volleyball, you know that it would not be good if you had “clone” players with the same skills. What if you had six players who were all skilled setters, but could not hit the ball? What if you had six players that could all smash the ball, but no one who could legally set it? What if you had outstanding setters and hitters, but nobody who could bump the ball accurately? You need all facets to have a great team.

In the same way, God has blessed you all with different gifts, some of which I mentioned, but many more could be included: Artistic gifts, generosity, cooking, crafts, encouraging, coaching, good

friends, willing volunteers, and more!

What grace that God gives gifts!

2 – That’s only half the story. Jesus’ parable continues with how these men used their talents, and it gives us a chance to think about our use of God’s talents as well. Jesus said, *“The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.”*

Here we have two different examples of the use of gifts, quite dramatic ones at that. Very vivid words describe two of the masters’ servants:

- *“at once”*
- *“put to work”*
- *“gained”*

The man with five talents and the man with two talents wasted no time, but went “at once” and began to use their gift. They “put it to work,” literally invested it in trading, and they “gained” resources for their master. They were faithful. They made the most of their talents and they doubled the return on them. A person might ask whether the one with two talents was not as faithful because he did not gain five like the other servant, but this is a good lesson of what Jesus taught in Luke 12: To whom much is given, much will be required.

We see the other example in the man who had been given the one talent. The vivid words that describe his actions are:

- *“dug”*
- *“hid”*

Didn’t this action take more effort than simply putting it in the bank?

We see more vivid words in how the master treats these servants when he returns. He talks to the faithful servants first and uses words like:

- *“well done”*
- *“good / faithful”*
- *“come share happiness”*

In fact, the master has more good things to give, putting them “in charge of many things.”

When he comes to the unfaithful servant, here are the vivid words:

- *“you are a hard man”*
- *“afraid”*
- *“hid”*
- *“wicked / lazy / worthless”*
- *“outside / darkness / weeping / gnashing”*

This servant has the gall to accuse his master of his own failure! Yet he has no excuse to stand on. Isn't it interesting that Jesus pictures the unfaithful man as the one with one talent? Perhaps most of you don't see yourself as the man with five talents in the parable. But Jesus pictures the unfaithful one as the one with just one talent! He was not condemned because he had fewer talents. He was not condemned because he did evil acts with his talent. No, he was unfaithful because he did not use his talent at all. Jesus is saying, “No matter what your gift may be, you are to use it faithfully. Your gifts may be different. Your gifts may even be less than someone else's. But each one of you use your gift – even if it's one gift – faithfully.” **This is a lesson in “It might have been.”**

Do you understand? And are you living the life of a faithful servant?

We can sin in a couple different ways when it comes to using our God-given gifts. One way is by neglect. It is a great thing to be dubbed a “churchgoer.” A main reason that your church is here is to serve you on Sundays and to nurture your faith. But is that all? Is it only a one-way street? The sin of many in our church might be neglect of their gift – The gift of loving and teaching children is given and could be used for the good of a congregation, but...it might have been. The gift of music is given that could be used to edify the congregation, but...it might have been. The gift of financial savvy-ness is given to an individual, who could benefit a congregation, but...it might have been. And so on. Fill in your gift.

Excuses, naturally, can quickly come. I can't serve in the way I've been gifted because:

- I'm busy (I know, you personally are the busiest one in this room, right?)
- I'm tired.
- Others could do better than me.
- I just don't want to.
- I don't want to be criticized for my service.
- I don't want to fail, so I will dig a hole for my talent.

Another way we can sin is in our attitude when we actually are using our gifts. Perhaps our attitude as we serve is less than ideal. Maybe our joy has long faded away. Maybe we have degenerated to an attitude of duty or drudgery in serving. Maybe we're even angry that we have been called on to continue serving in some way.

Where will we find inspiration to break this cycle? You will find your inspiration in the words from 2 Corinthians: *“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”* You will find comfort in knowing your sin of neglect has been paid for by Christ. You will find comfort in realizing your sin of a grudging spirit or anger has been covered by Christ. He has served as your Savior to take away your guilt. And you will find inspiration in how he served you when he “didn’t have to.”

And now, we can rejoice that you still have time. The master has not returned yet. There are more opportunities for you! In all the areas we’ve mentioned today and more, God is still giving you opportunities to invest your talents for work in his kingdom! What will you plan to use them?

Finally the good news is that God even has more to give. In your service in God’s kingdom he gives rewards along the way. Perhaps this might be:

- A Sunday School child who gives you a hug at the end of the year.
- A building project or job that looks great.
- A youth program that you really helped and that caused you to bond with some of our young people.
- A great fellowship event for our church that you hosted.
- An outreach effort that brought us into contact with more people.

- A satisfying look back at how you’ve had a part in leading our church financially through a year, which really benefited from your service.
- A worship service you had a part in musically that was very edifying.
- And many more!

Then one day, God will say to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master’s happiness.” In the end this will happen not because of your exemplary service, but because of God’s grace and mercy, which was evidenced in your life by your actions.

The alternative is...“It might have been.”

May we thank God for forgiveness and for more opportunities. **And in this service series called “*Different Gifts, Same Grace*,” may God inspire us to faithful use of his gifts to us:**

- 1. What grace that he gives gifts**
- 2. What joy we have in using them**

May God lead us to be faithful stewards! Amen.