

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
June 1, 2014**

Matthew 25:14-30

The Measure of Success

- 1. How do you measure success?**
- 2. God's Measure of Success**

**Hymns: *Borning Cry* – 462
Distribution – 469 –239
Closing -332 vs. 1,4**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

How do you measure success? Certainly, there are many ways that a person could answer that question. In fact, the measure of success is often determined by the station that you man in life. For students and teachers, success is most often measured by the grades on a report card, the scores on a test, and the honors on a certificate. For employees, success is measured by productivity and accomplishments in the workplace, and the increased salaries and promotions that follow. For soldiers, success is measured by the pins and medals that decorate the uniform. Even for pastors, success is often measured; by the number of people in the seats, and new faces in the crowd.

Yet, for all the different ways to measure success, there is often this one commonality when it comes to the way in which this world measures success. In a material world, success is often, if not always, measured by results. From little on in this world, we are told that the results are what matter most, the results are how a person is judged. So, whether it be in school, in the workplace, on the athletic field or anywhere else, you strive to be the best; you push to succeed; you do it for the results.

That passion for results certainly has an impact on us Christians as we live in this world. It becomes very easy as parents, as students, as employees and employers, as pastors and teachers to measure our own success by those

same standards that the world so regularly uses. We look at the results to determine whether we are succeeding in life.

That same measure of success, that focus on results, can also have an impact on this day today. As school closes, many students and parents gather here today, waiting to receive that report card given by your teachers. But, as you wait for that piece of paper, consider carefully: “What has made this school year a success for your child?” “Will the grades written on that sheet of paper determine whether this year was a success or not?” “Will that diploma that you 8th graders receive from your principal be the marker that tells you whether the last 9 years of your school life have been a success or not?” For students and their parents and teachers, how easy it is to measure success by the results that we see.

Today, we also gather to celebrate a retirement. And what does a retirement celebration often become, except a celebration of results and accomplishments. Your career was a success because the school went from here to here; your work can be celebrated because you helped make Joe into this and Jill into that; you will be remembered because of how you do this and this and this...and this! As we look at two careers, how easy it is, again, to measure success by the results that we see.

Yet, is that what today is for? Is today about the results? Is today about the accomplishments? Is that the measure by which we determine what we will celebrate and give thanks for today? **The world would, undoubtedly tell us yes. Success is measured by results, so it is results that we will celebrate, it is results that we will remember.**

But of course, we need to ask, what would God have us celebrate today? What would God have us give thanks for today? How would God have us measure success here today?

In order to see the measure of success that God holds to, we will look at a parable that Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, words that were recorded by Jesus’ disciple Matthew.

Matthew tells us that Jesus told a tale about three men, men who were hired by one rich man to handle his investments when he went out of town. Each of those men were given different amounts of money to invest, but each was given

something to work with. The owner left town, and then came back after a while and had each of the investors come and give a report on their work. Listen to those reports to the owner and the owner's response to each, and consider this question as you hear them, "How was success measured by the master?"

*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! 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! 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!*

As we look at those reactions, it would be easy to say that the Master viewed success in correlation with the results. The two servants who produced results were commended for their work and the servant that produced nothing was condemned for his work.

But as we look more closely, we see that the results were not the measure at all; instead, the Master determined success according to a different standard. The world would tell us that the man who produced five should be seen as more successful than that man who produced two, and that, as a result, his reward should be greater, his celebration should be bigger. However, to both the man that produced five more and the man that produced two more, the Master gave the exact same commendation and each of those servants received the very same reward, even though their results were not the same. How did that Master determine success? Listen to his reply to both. He does not say, "Well done, good and productive servant." Instead, he proclaims, "Well done, good and faithful servant." It was faithfulness to the work

that determined success in the master's eyes, and each of these men were measured to be successful by the master, though their faithfulness produced different results. The master's standard of success was so different than what we are used to.

What a relief that brings to us who gather here today. Because it is God who is that master in this story that measures success by a different standard.

So many in this world, they work for themselves; to enjoy success, to gather up rewards, even to earn God's favor. But for God's workers, the motivation is something far different, because children of God understand that they aren't trying to earn or prove anything. God, in his Word, makes it very clear that earning success is an impossibility for sinners. All our work would ever prove is how often we fall short and how messed up our motives often become.

Instead of standards to meet and productivity to achieve, God gives this simple directive to his people, "Be faithful. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." What God teaches in his Word is so clear. Yet, how often don't we, with the rest of the world, live our lives – and shape our attitudes and motives – as if God has said, "Be productive to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life."

When the results tempt to become our sole measure of success, may we remember this comforting truth: As people of God our success is determined long before we do any work in this world, our success has been made certain by God himself. It is through his Son, Jesus Christ, and the work that he did that success is earned and proved. He earned forgiveness when he died on the cross. He proved his success when he rose from the dead. And now, after he has ascended into heaven, he rules all things at the right hand of God and all of our success in this world is guided by him.

That means today, in order to determine and celebrate success, we don't have to wait to see the grades on those report cards, or to see the signatures on those diplomas. We don't have to list off the accomplishments and recite all the many things that Mr. and Mrs. Rodmyre will be remembered for. We don't have to make note of

our job titles or look into our bank accounts. All of those things serve a purpose, but success is determined by none of them.

So, how do we measure success? Success is measured as an assignment is faithfully completed on a Tuesday night in February. Success is measured as a teacher faithfully prepares a lesson like it will be taught the next day for the first time, even if it is the 35th time. Success is measured as the worker faithfully sweats over every last detail even when the boss might never see the work.

Success is found when God can look at his dearly loved children and the work that they do for him in this world, and speak these beautiful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! And where God finds those faithful servants, he gives this glorious invitation: "Come and share in your master's happiness!" May we strive for that type of success in all we do. May we give thanks for that type of success in all that we celebrate. Amen.