

The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 25:14-30

There is a story, in a past issue of "Guidepost" magazine, in the "Christmas Issue", that one could read over and over again.

It is the story of a young man named, "Paul". It was the Christmas Season and Paul had received a very special gift from his older brother.

Paul received a brand new car from his brother. On Christmas Eve, when Paul came out of his office, a street kid, was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. When Paul went to get into car the kid asked him, "Mister, is this your car?"

When Paul replied that it was, and that his brother had given it to him for Christmas, the boy said; "You mean your brother gave it to you, and it didn't cost you anything? Free, for nothing? Gosh, I wish.."

The boy hesitated and Paul knew what he was about to say. He had heard it many times over, over the past few days.

He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the boy said jarred Paul all the way down to his toes.

"I wish, the boy went on, "that I could be a brother like that." I like this story because it takes me by surprise.

I realized that more often than not, I would prefer, "to have a brother like that", than, "to be a brother like that."

I like this story because deep down in my heart, I really wish I did have the desire to be a brother like that.

What about you? Which would you prefer to be said about you; that you had a brother like that, or that you are a brother like that?

This story about the young boy and the question I pose are not that far removed from the teaching we find in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25.

Notice in the story, that Jesus told that all three servants are similar. Each was a recipient of a gift.

None of them had done anything to deserve or earn the gift. There was no sense of entitlement, in fact, even though they were expected to use the gift, the ownership remained with the master.

We fast forward to the end of the story and accounting is made of the servants. Two are described as "good and trustworthy" and one is said to be "wicked and lazy".

I think we realize that the servants in this story represents each of us. So who is the Master? Well, the Master is God.

The purpose of the story is to push us to answer the question, "Do you want to be like the First servant, or the Second servant, or do you want to be like the Third servant?"

What do we want God to say to us? I think most of us, would hear what Jesus said, we would point to the first two servants and say: "I want to be a servant like that!"

So what happened with the third servant? We'll need to go to the end of the story in order to see what the problem was.

Listen to what the servant said to the master in verse 24: "Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have, what is yours.'"

The problem for this servant was that he had a total misunderstanding of the nature of the master.

He had his mind made up about the master, even before he received his talent. He thought the master was harsh, and did not care about anything as long, as he got his due.

This servant did not really know the master. He just saw the shadow of the master and built his whole life on a faulty premise.

So what is your understanding of God? A.W. Tozer was right when he said that: "What we think about God is the most important thing about us."

If we view God as a tyrant, then we'll filter everything through this lens. Some of us may be secretly angry with God, because we think God did something, or didn't do something, that we think He should have done.

As a result, our view of God is skewed. Our preconceived notions prevent us from seeing God, as a God of grace, and as a result, we refuse to serve God with what He has given you and I.

When we blame God, we end up burying our blessings. A faulty view of God, can also lead to excuses.

In verse 25 of our gospel narrative for today, the third servant declares that the reason he didn't do anything, with what he had been given, was because he was afraid.

His fear paralyzed him, and so he decided to play it safe. He hid the money in the ground to make sure it wouldn't be lost.

A wrong view of God always leads to fear. We read: "so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground." Vs.25

This is what led to the downfall of this servant and it is what causes us to fall. We think we know the master; we think we know God; God is a God of wrath, who punishes people and causes bad things to happen, and we build our entire life around the wrong God and it leads to fear.

Did you notice the word that is repeated in this last servant's statement? Listen again, this is in verse 24. "Then the one who had received the one talent, also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. (vs 24 to 25).

“I, I, I”, when we have the wrong understanding of God, it leads to fear and life becomes about self.

When we hear this parable of Jesus, we say, I sure do not want to be like that third servant, instead, I want to be like the first two servants.

Notice the difference in the way, the first two servants, understood the nature of the master. When they approach the master, they both say, “Master, you handed over to me”. In other words you “entrusted your gifts to me”.

You see, our understanding of God, affects everything about us. This story, is truly amazing. Those who first heard it, must have thought that Jesus was out of His mind.

This story, this parable went against everything, that someone living in the First Century, saw as normal.

From the opening line, this story is intended to be a shocker. In the Roman culture no significant property holder would entrust his property to a slave, not even for a short period of time.

This man was giving these three slaves, the equivalent of 120 years of daily wages to manage. Think about that.

Take your annual income and multiply it by 75. That is the equivalent to what he gave the first servant. Take your annual income and multiply it by 30. That is the equivalent to what he gave the second servant. Now take your annual income and multiply it by 15. That is what he gave the third servant.

This man is either crazy or incredibly trusting of his slaves to do the right thing. What the two slaves did next was also shockingly offensive to a Jewish audience, and could have felt uncomfortable to many Christian audiences.

These slaves committed a grave sin, called, “usury”, by making money with money. And they did it, without hesitation, taking the money, and working it immediately, until they doubled their investments.

The third servant (believe it or not) did the most moral even biblically response, burying the money, about 15 years worth of wages in this case to protect it.

What the master did in response to the first two slaves, would have been seen as offensive. He not only commended these two slaves, he even promoted them to what would be today, upper management.

The third, who did the most morally correct thing, gets extreme condemnation. He is called, “wicked” and “lazy”. He is still treated as a slave, what was given to him, was taken away and split with the other slaves.

So in the normal scope of things, this story makes no sense at all, if we make the focus of the story about money.

So what is the real gift in this story? Is it the talents or bags of gold, remember, the third servant, saw the talent as the gift presented by the master.

The real gift of this of this parable, is not about five talents, three talents or even one talent. It is about "Trust". The master trusted them all.

The size of the gift in the story really doesn't matter. The sum of the money, that was given, was 120 years of wages, but did you notice that the master referred to it as little.

The master basically said to his servants, "Look, you have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now, I will give you many more responsibilities."

If everything belongs to God to begin with, what we are given is always small in comparison. If we are talking about the gift as being possessions, the master does not need what the servants bring back.

The gift that is given is "grace". "Trust" is the appropriate response to grace, therefore, being shown trustworthiness, is trust returned and faith, demonstrated.

There have been times when I have looked at this story, and wished that Jesus had told it differently.

So what do you mean pastor? What if there had been another servant who took the money his master gave him, and instead of burying it, he invested it, and lost it all.

Through the lens of the world we live in, that would make this story more realistic. But you see, the thrust of this story, this parable is not about money, but about trust.

When we take a risk for the master, when we take a risk for God, based on trust (i.e. faith) there are no losers. Faith is trust acted upon and always produces more faith.

Our understanding of God, affects what we do with what God has given us, this demonstrates what we believe.

Trust yields more trust, Jesus said (this is in verse 29) "For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance."

I pray that you and I will be servants like that, (the first two) and that one day as we stand before Christ, we will hear these words: "Well done good and trustworthy slave." Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, you call us to the trust in You all the more, more than anything else. Be with us in our day to day lives as we seek to trust in You in all things, following You in faith, living by faith and walking by faith, as we live in your grace, as your people in this day and time. All these things we humbly pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.