



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 25, 2011

Different Gifts, Same Grace - Week 1

Sermon Text: [Matthew 25:14-30](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Exodus 35:30-36:7](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 121](#)

Second Lesson: [Galatians 5:13-26](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 25:14-30](#)

You Are a Gifted Servant

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been'." A poet named John Greenleaf Whittier wrote those words in 1886 I believe it was. I don't know what he was thinking about, but I think his words express great truth. Lost opportunities, lost/misused blessings, lost/misused resources, wasting talent...it's a sad thing, what might have been.

I think part of what Jesus was trying to teach to his disciples three days before he died when he told them this parable was not only that there is going to come a day when there is an accounting given, Judgment Day, which is what the words right after our text lead into, but he is reminding them, "Don't waste the time, the talents, the opportunities that I give you until that day comes." He was going to leave them. His visible presence was going to be gone. They were going to feel like fish out of water without him there to guide them, and he's telling them, "I've given you gifts. Put them to use. Be faithful with what God has entrusted to you."

As we consider *Different Gifts, Same Grace*, one great truth that we see as we start to consider various spiritual gifts the Lord bestows in his people is that each and every Christian is a gifted servant. The Christian that says "There's nothing I can do," the Christian that says "I don't have an ability to do anything to serve," they are calling God a liar because God has said to each one "the manifestation of the spirit has been given for the common good." If you think you don't have anything you can do, take it up with God. He's told you that you do.

So what does he expect of you since he's given something to you? That's what this parable is all about. He expects you to be faithful because you have generous gifts that your Master has poured out on you, and be faithful because it's a joy to serve the God who loves us as much as our God loves us.

You're a gifted servant. To make this point, Jesus tells a parable where there are three servants gifted by their master, and gifted generously. He tells the story, and the details are pretty easy to understand. He gives to one five talents of money, to another two talents of money and to another one talent of money. If you want to understand what a talent is and if you want to understand how generous this guy is in this parable Jesus is telling, a drachma was one day's wage. They didn't have mandatory breaks and they had no OSHA watching over them. If you went out and worked the whole day, you got a drachma, one. If you got 100 drachma, about three months wages, you would have a

mina. And if you had a whole bunch of mina, you would get to a talent. So one talent would be equal to 15 years' wages of the average worker of that day.

Fifteen years' wages he handed over to this guy who was the least gifted of the bunch, right? He gave it to them according to their own ability. He gave 30 years' wages to the guy who had twice the talent of that first guy, right? And to the guy who had five times as much talent as the first guy he gave 75 years' wages. They didn't live all that long back then, did they? So when we say this guy was generous, we read five, two and one and go "Oh yeah. Five, that's Abraham Lincoln. Two, I forget who is on the \$2 bill...Jefferson? And one, that's a Washington. That's it?" That's not what we are talking about here. 75 years, 30 years, 15 years...it's an amount of money that most of the people of that day would only dream about. So this master is incredibly wealthy. He goes away for a long time and he says, "Here. I'm giving you a portion of my estate. I want you to take care of it. I want you to manage it. I want you to put it to use for my benefit. It's mine. I've given it to you. You use it to benefit me." That sounds reasonable. It's his money, right?

So "at once" we are told the five guy goes out and the two guy goes out, and "at once" the one guy goes out and digs a hole. We'll come back to that later, but just stop for a minute and consider just how generous this master is. Think of all that he is entrusting to these people while he is going to be gone. This isn't a trifling that he is entrusting to them. This is something that is very important to him and that no doubt makes up a very large part of his wealth.

Is it any different with our God? Is our God any less generous with us? Look at the things he pours out on us day after day after day, and we get bored by it. You and I should rot in hell for all eternity because we are filthy rotten sinners. You and I have a sinful nature that at times finds that boring. "I don't want to go to church. That's boring. All I do is sit and hear about how God loves me and took away my sins." Really? That's a "you" problem. And at times that's probably a problem that each of us has, right? We are filthy rotten sinners and we don't understand just how generous our God is and that he took every last one of our sins, strapped them on his back, walked to a cross, and took them there so that they would be punished so that we wouldn't be punished. And when you ever stop marveling at that or you take that for granted, you have a great big problem because you aren't going to appreciate God's love very much, are you? Then the whole world will be about you and revolve around you and how does everything benefit you, and if it doesn't benefit you, it's not important. Watch out for that because that's where our sinful nature lives. That's where Satan lives. And that's where you and I at times really want to live. We want it to be all about us.

But this is how much generosity our God pours out on us...he slaps us around with his Law and shows us what we deserve. Then he lifts us up with his Gospel and says, "But I was perfect in your place. I kept every one of those Commandments that you don't want to keep." Jesus came to earth and didn't say "It's all about me," although it should have been. He came to earth and said "It's all about you. I'll be perfect in your place. I'll die for your sins." That ought to thrill us to the tip of our toes every time we wake up

in the morning until the time that we go to bed at night because it's absolutely amazing that our God loves us that much.

Think about it...you and I, within a congregation, even though we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and we share the same faith and we share the same love of God, we don't love each other all the time, right? So if we don't think that the other person is worthy of loving, think of how much more we ourselves have done to God and yet God still loves us. It's absolutely amazing!

Our God is generous to us. He's washed away every last one of our sins. That ought to be enough for us but often it's not. So take a look around and look at what God gives you. Look at the generosity he pours out on you. He gives you spiritual gifts to put in service to his kingdom. He gives you everything you need for body and life. He gives you everything you need, not everything you want. He hasn't given me the Powerball numbers yet, and Lord knows I want them. He gives you everything you need. That's his promise to you. That's amazing. Everything you need for life. That's our God.

Picture the pew you are sitting in as the waiting room before you are going in for an interview. It's the interview to be the executive assistant to Bill Gates or Oprah Winfrey, fill in the blank of whoever you think you never could be the executive assistant to. You're all worried and think "Man, my resume really looks lousy. How am I going to serve this person? They are everything. Everyone looks up to them. Who am I to be at their right hand and do all that stuff for them? I'm nothing. I don't belong here. I should just get up and leave." Do you think those thoughts would be going through your mind?

Now think about your resume for serving your Lord. Achievements...maybe you have a few you can put down there. Shortcomings...do you have enough paper? Sins...got enough paper to list them all? Mistakes...got enough paper to list them all? Yet, when you walk into the room and God interviews you and says, "Yes. You are my executive assistant. I've trusted you with these spiritual gifts;" wow! "To everyone the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good." I'm convinced that many Christians have more than just one spiritual gift. If you want to know what the spiritual gifts are, we've been looking at them in Romans 12, that list of seven. They are also in 1 Corinthians 12 and in 1 Peter 4. Just start digging in and maybe you'll recognize "Yeah, I think the Lord has given me this spiritual gift."

God has said to you, "You're resume that stinks...I've washed all those sins away. When I look at you, I see the perfection that is Jesus Christ. You are holy and blameless in my sight. You are eminently qualified to be my representative to the world because Jesus' blood and righteousness covers you." Think of that generosity. God has said "You're it! You're my ambassador. You're my right hand man, now go and serve the world." Isn't that amazing? Isn't that absolutely unbelievable? I bet you can list 10 people that you know that are here this morning that aren't qualified to do it, and hopefully your name is on that list. But God says, "Get over it. I'm equipping you. I've

made you this. You can do it. I've given each of you different gifts. Some have 5, some 2, some 1...different amounts, different levels of talents. But that isn't the problem. Whatever gift I've given you, it's mine. I've said to you this is important to me that you go and use it to serve others and serve them faithfully." Wow! That's what our God does.

Faithfulness...that's what God wants, right? God as the master in this parable...we see two responses from the people that were entrusted with these gifts. The five guy and the two guy go out at once and put them to use. By the time the master returns, instead of 75 years' wages, he has 150 years' wages. Think about that. But he had that ability, right? He gave them to each according to their abilities. That person gave it to him and he knew he had that ability. This guy was faithful and he used them faithfully. That's great. That's what the master wanted. What does the master say? "Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness!" He's just ecstatic, isn't he? He isn't worried that he might be praising that guy too much. He's just thrilled about it.

"Well done, good and faithful servant"...that's what we want to hear from our God as we seek to serve him. We shouldn't be worried about what other people might say. We want to hear from our God, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The second guy...two talents...same thing. Then comes the one talent guy. Maybe he is the least gifted because he just has a plain rotten attitude, doesn't he? You kind of get the feeling as he talks to his master that he absolutely doesn't really care a whole lot for his master. It's more about him than it is about the master. "I know you are a hard man." How does that work for you at job reviews? "I know you're a jerk boss." Does that go over well? Isn't that what this guy just said to the master? "I know you are a hard man who reaps where you didn't sow and does this and that. I really don't like you a lot and I think you're the problem." Isn't that exactly what he just said to his master? That took a lot of courage, didn't it? Or a lack of gray matter? One of the two.

"So here is what I did because I know you are such a jerk. I went and dug a hole and hid it. Here's your talent back. I'll be on my way, sir. Thank you." That isn't how it works though, is it? He expects faithfulness from whatever level of ability that person has. If Jesus would have told the parable this way, that it's the five talent guy that wasn't faithful, we would have said, "But I'm not that talent. That doesn't apply to me." He makes it the one talent guy that isn't faithful, so there isn't any of us that can say "My stuff isn't that important." This master was looking for faithfulness out of each and every one of them. The guy that had the least ability was also entrusted with the least, but he was given what he could handle. He just chose not to handle it. He chose not to do it. He chose to love himself more than he loved his master, right?

When love for yourself becomes the thing that is in the center of our vision, here's the danger. It's going to crowd out love for God. Love for self leads me to look only at myself. I don't see what Jesus has done for me then. I don't see what God is doing for me. I just see myself, and then I get bored by Jesus.

The master doesn't hold back. "You knew I'm a jerk, huh? You knew I reap where I don't sow. So here's what I'm going to do. I'm taking away what you had, that talent. Give it to the guy who had 10 and throw that worthless, lazy servant out where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The warning implicit there is that if we love ourselves more than we love God, that crowds out faith, and we will be condemned to hell.

God's point here is be faithful with the gifts and the abilities he has given to us. If he has given us this spiritual gift to serve, then serve, and do it faithfully. Don't look for attention from someone else. As Christians, we should thank those who serve us, most certainly. And if we don't, that's an "us" problem. But we don't serve just to be thanked. We serve because we have a God who loves us this much and entrusts us with this and says, "Here's a way you can show me your love." So we want to go out and show that kind of love.

Each and every one of us here has different spiritual gifts. Different means "different." It doesn't mean better and worse. It doesn't mean more important and less important. Anytime we attach any of those thoughts to it, that's something that comes out of our sinful nature. It doesn't come out of what God has said in Scripture. God's encouragement to us is he has gifted us in so many ways, he wants us to serve, and serve faithfully with no respect to what the return might be for us but simply to say "God, I love you because you loved me first. God, I'm thrilled that you've entrusted me with these gifts, and I want to serve you because you have loved me first."

So as Christians, let's quit digging holes in the ground and just serve faithfully our God who loves us.