

November 13, 2011 22nd Sunday After Pentecost Matthew 25:14-30

-Keep it Simple Stewardship Campaign Week 3-

Follows Skit for the Parable of the Talents

The Parable of the Talents that we have as our gospel reading and the dramatic reinterpretation we just had may at give us a wrongheaded idea of what being a Christian is all about. We may get the wrongheaded idea that being a Christian is an individual undertaking. Many hear this parable and think that life goes something like this: God makes you and gives you talents and abilities. And then God gives you a pat on the back and sends you out to use those talents to the best of your ability. And then at the end of life you return to God to give a reckoning of how you did. And you'd better hope and pray you've gotten a good enough return. (8:30 A twist on this is the idea of a prosperity gospel...)

But that's not how the life of a Christian works. The life of a Christian is a community undertaking, not an individual one. When you were baptized you were not baptized alone. You were baptized into a community of faith. And promises were made all around. If you were an infant your parents made promises on

your behalf and if you were older you made promises to live in the covenant of that baptism. And the congregation made promises too - they would help to nurture and provide for you. A good part of the reason for having Sunday School and Bible Sunday and Confirmation Class and Youth Group and all sorts of things is so that this community of faith, St. John's Lutheran Church, can help to nurture and grow those baptized into it. And not just grow their faith. We are about more than just creating a belief system. We are about more than just creating a moral foundation. We are about nurturing the whole person as God has created that person to be whole. I certainly hope people do not see church as a *part* of a well-balanced life, at least not here at St. John's. I hope this church provides a well-balanced life in whole.

As we are in our Make it Simple stewardship drive I believe that is what we should be aiming to be in the coming year; not be a *part* of its parishioners life, not one more voice among so many out their clamoring for a bit of its members hard earned cash, *but a community that can provide wholeness*. I hope that in and through this congregation people can find all of their needs met. This does not mean we need to develop a comprehensive set of programs and ministries for every aspect of

life. That would be almost cult like. It does mean that here and among your brothers and sisters in Christ you can feel whole; the wholeness that God created you to be.

So if the parable and the skit are not about individuality what are they about? They're talking about a step down the line. In the parable the owner and the slaves are all part of the same household. Each had a part. In the skit the manager and the assistants are all part of the same company. When one person does not do his or her job the whole company suffers.

What happens when you are at work and you have your part of the project done on time and within budget, but someone else doesn't? The whole project suffers and the whole company suffers. A secretary may find him or herself out of a job because of a manager's laziness. Sure, sometimes there are good reasons for why a project doesn't go as planned. But when everyone is working together you can overcome those difficulties. Slackers and manipulators don't contribute. I've never heard of a well-managed company with devoted managers and laborers that failed.

What does the owner do in the parable, and the manager do in the skit? Casts out the ineffective worker and gives the job to someone else.

Your gifts and abilities, your talents as some might say, are given to you by God as a child of God. But I don't like to use the word "talent" here, even though it's meaning is rooted in this parable. The way we speak of talents today it is as if they were a set group of special abilities God has given to you. Some people feel talented and can make a lot of money at it. Sports stars and movie stars come to mind. Other people feel like they have no talents because nothing they can do shines. But that is not true in both cases. Talents weren't given you for you to use selfishly, and a lack of talents does not mean a person who is less capable. Also, don't think of your gifts and abilities as static and unchanging. They are ever changing and ever growing. What you use today you may not find useful tomorrow, and the reverse is true too. To see them as static is to be like the slave or the assistant who did nothing with them.

No, you are capable. Use and engage what you have in community with your brothers and sisters in Christ. To do so is

to make us all stronger, more whole. To not do so is to make us weaker and incomplete.

The life of a Christian is one of community. Together we grow or wither, we laugh and we cry, we work and we play. We thank God for giving us each other and pray that we may always rejoice what God has done. Amen