

"ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR LORD"  
22nd Sunday After Pentecost (A)– 13 Nov 2011  
St. Mary Evangelical Lutheran Church – Des Moines, IA  
Pastor Jeff Siegel  
TEXT – 1 Thes 5:9

When it comes to our Gospel reading, the Parable of the Talents, with the exception of recognizing the master as God and the servants as people like you and me, there is quite a diversity of interpretation. What do you see in the parable? Do you see God loving some people more than others—after all, He gave differing amounts of talents to each servant? Do you see God as someone who demands service to Him and rewards those who serve Him—giving more to those who give Him the most and best service? Do you see a wrathful God who is unforgiving of failure—as He was with the servant He gave the one talent to?

The truth is, and you can know that it is the truth because the Bible clearly tells us that God loves all people equally, that He demands nothing in exchange for your salvation (the fact is that in Christ He did everything required to save everybody), and that He desires to forgive all people their sins so they may live. Saint Paul expresses this comforting reality in the Epistle reading, "9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." [1Th 5:9 (NKJ)] The master in the parable, who represents Christ, says the same thing to the faithful servant, who represents you, but in a more personal and intimate way, "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

What is the "joy of your Lord," Jesus Christ? That you receive the benefit of His atoning sacrifice for you on the cross—eternal life. We see this in Hebrews and Saint Peter's first Epistle. The writer of Hebrews tells us: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who *for the joy that was set before Him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. [emphasis added]" [Heb 12:1-2 (NKJ)] To this we add Saint Peter's words: "<sup>24</sup> [Christ] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness-- by whose stripes you were healed." [1Pe 2:24 (NKJ)] Together we see that Christ's joy is to save you by taking on all your sins, to heal you from the sin you inherited down through the generations from Adam and Eve, so that you may live—that is, live *eternally*. This is the core of your faith. This is the Gospel, to which the cloud of witnesses—believers in Christ—testify to you for your comfort, salvation, and eternal life: "<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." [1Jo 5:11-12 (NKJ)]

When you were conceived, you had no faith, and therefore, you did not have the Son of God. You couldn't "enter the joy of your Lord" because He wasn't your Lord. Being sinful at conception, the devil was your Lord and you were a citizen of his kingdom, this fallen world. The devil's 'joy' to which you entered at conception was your eternal death and damnation, for that is what he wants for you. Christ described your relationship with the devil prior to God

giving you faith and making Jesus your Lord this way: <sup>44</sup> "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." [Joh 8:44 (NKJ)]

The so-called 'joy' of the devil is nothing but a pack of lies that leads to only one place—death. The devil told you that you would obtain joy through sinning because you would be satisfying the desires of your flesh, and you believed him. Because of your sinful nature, you *couldn't* believe otherwise. But does sin bring true joy—true happiness? Does it truly bring life? No. The Law God wrote on your heart weighs you down with a guilty conscience, which you may be able to suppress for a while, but you can never get rid of it totally. Reality, experience, sides with God's truth and not the devil's so-called truth. God hates sin because sin hurts you and those around you. So-called 'pleasures' only bring grief. For example: gambling's dark side is well known; sex outside of marriage has ruined lives and wreaked social and economic devastation on individuals and the country; and buying and owning 'things' doesn't bring happiness, for you are never satisfied with what you have because there is always something new and better waiting around the corner.

So, if the 'joy' of the devil is the only 'joy' you know, how can you receive the true joy of Christ—how can you "enter the joy of the Lord."? Through Jesus' efforts. *He* brought you into His joy. *He* did all the work necessary to bring you into His joy. First, He did everything necessary to save you because you can't save yourself. He lived a sinless life for you. He suffered and died on the cross for you. He rose from the dead for you. Then He brought you into His joy through your baptism. At the font His Spirit gave you faith, and through that faith you entered into your Lord Christ's joy, for in your baptism you became a child of God and thus Jesus became your Lord.

Jesus, your Lord and Master, left a long time ago, but He promised to return. As the master in the parable left each of his servants an amazing treasure to look after until his return, Jesus, your Master, left a priceless treasure in your care until His return. That treasure is the Gospel, the only thing that gives eternal life. Nothing else compares.

When you read the parable of the talents you can't help but ask yourself, "Have I been faithful in using Christ's gift of His life-giving Gospel as He would want me to?" Christ gave you His Gospel to strengthen your faith and the faith of other believers, and to use to bring others to faith. Have you attended worship at every possible opportunity? Have you been in His Word through personal devotion? Have you shared the Gospel with others when the opportunity arose or invited them to receive the Gospel here in church? If you're honest with yourself, your answer will be "no." Even if you claim to have been a faithful servant to God by doing all these things, you have truly been *unfaithful* because your service to Him has been tainted by your sinful nature. Pride permeates your actions with the result that you really are more faithful to yourself than God. This is evident when you take credit for your successes rather than give *all* the glory to God and pat yourself on the back for being such a good Christian.

Reflecting on all this, which of the servants in the parable do you think you are? When Jesus returns, will He call you a "good and faithful servant" and tell you to "enter into the joy of your

Lord."? Or will He say to you, "You wicked and lazy servant" and cast you "into the outer darkness" where "[t]here will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."? In terms of what you know will happen on the Last Day, this question can be rephrased as. "Will I be raised to eternal life or eternal damnation?" There's no doubt that the disposition of your heart and your actions place you in the same league as the "wicked and lazy servant," but you will hear "well done, good and faithful servant" instead. Why? Because, through your God-given faith, Jesus' good works and faithfulness to His, and your, Father is credited to you! When you stumbled, when you sinned, the Spirit worked repentance in you and you asked for, and received, forgiveness in Jesus' name. When you did so, God no longer counted your sins against you. He forgot them. It was as if they never happened. Cleansed by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, God sees you as a "good and faithful servant" because He sees His Son whose blood covers you. Rather than seeing the wicked person you are because of your sinful nature, God sees His Son, "who came not to be served, but to serve." God sees the only "good and faithful servant" who ever walked on the face of the earth.

It is comforting to know that you are forgiven for Jesus' sake and have received eternal life in His name, but don't let this blessed truth cause you to miss a very important point of the parable: the unfaithful servant is a *servant* just like the faithful ones. The unfaithful servant is a member of the household of God, the Master. He once was a faithful servant, but He ended up removing himself from the household through his unbelief. He didn't see his Master as the loving person He truly is. Rather, he succumbed to the world, to the thoughts and ways of his old Adam. Your Old Adam wants you to become an unfaithful servant. He wants you to separate yourself from God.

One way your Old Adam gets you to separate yourself from God is to get you to see God in a false light so you'll then revile Him and turn your back on the evil caricature of Him that you created just as the unfaithful servant did in the parable. There is forgiveness for being unfaithful, as you have seen with the faithful servants and through your own experience with confession and absolution and the forgiveness of sins you receive in the Lord's Supper. However, the unfaithful servant represents what happens to a faithful servant when he or she constantly refuses the Master's offer of forgiveness that He presents in His Word and Sacrament. When you separate yourself from God's Word and Sacrament, you separate yourself from forgiveness. When Christ's blood no longer covers you, God no longer sees you as a "good and faithful servant," but as a "wicked and lazy servant."

Your relationship with your Lord, your Master, determines how you view the day of His return, the Last Day which Zephaniah and Saint Paul refer to in our readings as "the Day of the Lord.". When you separate yourself from God's forgiveness you see the Day of the Lord as Zephaniah depicts it—as "A day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, [and] A day of clouds and thick darkness." [Zep 1:15 (NKJ)] Living in the forgiveness of your Master, which he offers to you through His Word and Sacrament in His Church while He is away, you see the Day of the Lord as a joyous event to look forward to. You see the last day as Saint Paul depicts it in the epistle reading: a Day you joyfully prepare for by being in God's word and living out that Word in love of God and neighbor in the power of the Holy Spirit. By being in the Word and receiving the Sacrament God strengthens your faith. Saint Paul likens this to armor that protects you in battle. In this

case, it is God's armor and it protects you in a real battle—a battle against the devil for your very soul. The Day of the Lord, Saint Paul tells us, is to be eagerly awaited and welcomed, "<sup>9</sup> [f]or God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us..." [1Th 5:9-10 (NKJ)]

Because of Christ's faithfulness to God to the point of dying on the cross for you, God sees you not as the sinful, wicked servant that you truly are, but as a faithful servant. And He will treat you as such. Because of Christ's perfect obedience on your behalf and His dying in your place, you look forward to the Day of the Lord, the Last Day when Jesus will raise all the dead to eternal life or eternal damnation. For on that Day, because Christ's righteousness is yours through the faith you received at your baptism, you will hear these words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." [Mat 25:23 (NKJ)] Amen.