

Year A Proper 33 Well done, good and faithful servant Matt 25 14 to 30

In today's story we learn that not only are we all given gifts by God – because, of course the master in this story is meant to be understood as God – but, more importantly, we are expected to make use of them and, perhaps most important of all, we don't know how much time we have to make use of our gifts – the Lord could come back at any time – so we had better make use of them now.

One of the interesting things that this story tells us about God's gifts, is that we are going to be giving them back to him. We are going to use our gifts to create more goodness in this world, to build for God's kingdom, and then we're going to hand it all over to him when he comes.

So, God has gifts that he gives to us and we give them back. This makes me think of Christmas time when I was a young girl. When I figured out that Christmas was about giving gifts just as much as it was about getting gifts, I wanted to give gifts to the people I loved. My dad would take me and my brother out to Woolworth's to pick something out for my mum and my dad would buy it, wrap it, and give it to us to give to our mum. My mum would do the same thing so that we could give a gift to my dad as well. But it was all my dad's money – he was the only one in our family who had a job. That didn't matter one bit to him – he joyfully accepted our gift on Christmas morning knowing that his money had bought it. He had given us the money to buy his gift because he loved us and we had happily given his money back to him in the form of a brightly wrapped package with a surprise inside because we loved him.

It works the same way with God. God gives us gifts because he loves us. We take his gifts and transform them into things new and wonderful and we give them back because we love God. That is what he wants from us.

This story also tells us what God's reaction will be when we give his gifts back to him. The master's response to the first servant who made 5000 coins for him is one of praise. The master says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" I can think of nothing I would rather hear when I meet God than those words we heard today...Well done, good and faithful servant.

Next, the master gives the servant a promotion. He says the servant has done a good job with a little, so he's going to put him in charge of more. He's going to increase his responsibilities. This tells us that there will still be work to be done in God's kingdom. It won't be the same work as we're doing now in a broken world...what exactly it will be, we will have to wait to find out.

And finally, the master invites the servant to "come on in" and share his happiness. The "come on in" is an invitation to enter the household – to walk through the door. For us, this means an invitation to enter into God's kingdom.

Praise, promotion, and joy. That servant is in. The master turns now to the second servant. This one was given less money and made less money but, importantly, he is given the same rewards by his master. "Well done, good and faithful servant. I hereby promote you to take on more responsibilities and come on in, share my joy." Praise, promotion, and joy. This servant is also in.

We know from this that, even though we are all given different gifts – and different amounts of gifts, we will all share equally in the reward...if we use our gifts. That brings us to the third and final servant – the one who hid away the gift that had

been given to him and who tried to give it back to his master without having used it to produce something more.

This servant says he hid the gift away because he was afraid of his master. He says his master reaps harvests where he did not plant, and gathers crops where he did not scatter seed. Does this sound like our God...taking what doesn't belong to him? No. You can almost hear the sarcasm dripping from the master's response..."So, I take what isn't mine, eh?" He's not falling for the servant's excuse and lets us know what's really going on...the servant was lazy. The servant made a bad choice and tried to cover it up with an excuse but it didn't work. He paid the consequences for his choice. You can't pull the wool over God's eyes.

Jesus doesn't want us making excuses – hearers of the word must be doers of the word. We want to be wrapped in our wedding robe at the feast not the one thrown into the darkness. We want to be shining our lamps for others not the ones left out on the street after being told, "I don't know you" by the bridegroom.

Jesus tells us his burden is light...all he wants us to do is love God and love each other. Every other good thing is born from this love – our giving and forgiving, building a community...it all comes from love.

Perhaps some people don't end up using their gifts because they don't feel they have enough to make a difference in the world anyway. But, there's an African proverb that says, "If you think you're too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a room with a mosquito."

So, maybe some people do get more gifts than others. Maybe I'm not Mother Teresa, living in the slums of India to help the poor, but I give to those in need. And

maybe I'm not a famous evangelical preacher like Billy Graham but I tell the good news of Christ to the people around me.

When you use the gifts God gave to you, something amazing happens. I started my church experience as a young girl singing in a church choir. I became more involved and was asked to take on more – first a Lay Reader, then Warden of Lay Readers then Lay Pastor ...As I used my gifts, my gifts grew so that I could touch more people's lives, help more people, help the Church that I'm part of...The more we use our gifts, the more we will be given to use.

No matter how small the gift, no matter how small the way it is used, it will grow. Jesus' story tells us that. The master said to the third servant that he should have at least put the money into a bank and made a little bit of interest on it. That was the smallest, easiest way to use the master's gift and it would have grown.

So maybe you can't build a house but, you can hammer in a few nails.

Maybe you can't bake and decorate an elaborate wedding cake but, you can bake some chocolate chip cookies.

Maybe you can't soar like an eagle but, you can buzz like a mosquito.

We all have at least one gift – and it's a big one. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit, strengthened in us on the day we were baptized, and its power working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. So hammer some nails, bake a cake, or buzz like a mosquito. We can all accomplish something for God's kingdom. And then, when God comes, we will hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."