

Your Calling: You are a Gifted Servant!

Dear servants of God,

“For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: *It might have been.*” The poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, wrote that. While his poem spoke specifically of a lost opportunity in love, the truth of his verse extends far beyond that. We all understand the principal: What a sad thing to see wasted talent, wasted resources, wasted opportunities! “What might have been.”

In the verses of our Gospel Lesson, Jesus is speaking to his disciples three days before he died. He was telling them how he would soon be leaving them. He wanted them to be ready for the days to come. But he also wanted them to understand that as he left them, he was not leaving them unprepared. Jesus richly blesses his followers with many gifts. He equips them for living as his people. He wants them to use what he has given them to live out their calling.

Our text today is an illustration of Jesus' point. He says to each of us, “**You are a gifted servant!**” So today, let's consider your gifts and reflect upon how generously your Master gives and what a joy it is to use your gifts!

To get us there, Jesus tells a story. There was a man who was going on an extended journey. This man was rich—very rich. While he was gone, he wanted to give his servants an opportunity. So he entrusted some of his wealth to them. He knows them. He has seen them at work. He knows they have his best interests in mind because his interests provide for their interests.

And not only is this man rich, he is generous. The amounts he entrusts to his servants are not small. Each “talent” mentioned there corresponds to nearly 20 years of a day laborer's pay. And one of those servants got 5 of those – 100 years worth of work! Yes, I think that word “generous” fits. And yet he also shows his wisdom and shrewdness alongside of his generosity. He gives *each according to his ability*. The man gives something to all of them, but he is only going to give each servant what they are able to handle. He does his best to set them up for success.

And even at the end, the man was generous in his response to his servants after his return, right? He praises them. Look at verse 21: “**Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.**” You did well! You did the best with what you I gave you! You were faithful, and now I will give you even greater things. You thought I was generous before! My joy is yours; your place is at my side. “**Come and share you master's happiness!**” *How generously the master gives!*

And that is Jesus' point, isn't it? Our God is generous with us, his servants. And our minds naturally start with the stuff - food, shelter, clothes - stuff, more stuff than you even have room for and more resources than any generation before you in history. But even bigger, think of the spiritual blessings he has given you! He has called us to be his children. In Holy Baptism, he adopted you into his family. In his Word and at his table, he continues to assure us he has taken all of our sins away. He gives you this church and all its servants make sure you hear and are taught God's Word. The list goes on.

But let's also think of the abilities and talents he gives us. Each one of you has a unique set of gifts. He gives gifts in so many areas of life: skill in working with your hands, athletic ability, ability in math or science or language, skill in music or drawing or design. And even gifts in how you use your gifts: There are hard workers, caring encouragers, good friends, gifted leaders, willing volunteers, and again the list goes on.

How generously your master gives! You have been so richly blessed in so many ways! Now, in your calling as servants of God, you have the privilege to use the generous gifts of your Master as you live as his gifted servant.

Think about what a privilege that really is! What would it take to become a trusted servant of a powerful person? What if you wanted to be the personal assistant for Donald Trump, or Bill Gates, or LeBron James? Can you imagine what the interview would be like? You would be thinking, “How's my résumé? How do I look? What should I say?” You know they will only take the perfect candidate: one who has the right skills, a compatible personality, just the right amount of experience, who says just the

right thing, and ultimately can get things done. What a privilege it would be to be chosen, but how many of us would really have a shot? Now, what if we were applying for that same position before the Master of heaven and earth?

We are not the perfect candidates. Mistakes called sin fill our résumés. Failures from not doing the good things we should have fill our reports cards. The stains of the wrongs we have done cover our best interview outfit. So often, we say the wrong thing: lies and cursing, gossip and grumbling. By nature, we are an enemy of the one who is hiring for the position because our **“sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so”** (Romans 8:7).

How can we expect Jesus, the perfect Master, to hire us? To use us? We can’t. That is what makes it so astounding – so infinitely generous that he says: “I choose you. It will take an extreme makeover of sorts, but it is all at my expense.” How does he do this? Paul writes in Philippians, that he **“made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness”** (Philippians 2:7). He put himself in our place. He replaces our résumé of sin with his perfect life. He replaces our failures with his triumph. He places his words on our lips and in our hearts. He washes the stains from our suit with his blood. And He does it all on his dime. His gift will never fade. It lasts for eternity.

Because of his grace, we enter the Master’s service. *How generously your Master gives! He has made you a Gifted Servant!* So now, how do you respond?

In the parable, there are two very different responses to the master’s generosity. The first two servants are very similar. Verse 16: **“The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more.”** Did you catch that? **“At once.”** They were faithful. They made the most of their gifts, their abilities, their time, and the money entrusted to them. When the master returned, they considered it a privilege to return the profit to their Lord, who then says to them: **“Well done, good and faithful servant!”** Notice what they are commended for! Not for what they earned...For their faithfulness.

But the third guy is different. He was unfaithful in every respect. Verse 18: **He “went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.”** This action took more work than just putting in the bank. Then he presumes to lecture his master, as if *he* had some moral high ground – in the face of the one who had given him such a gift, with which, by the way, he did nothing!

Outlandish! Right? Inconceivable for someone to act like that! Right? How could he act like he knew better how to use His master’s gift than his master?!? Right? You know what’s coming next, don’t you? Any time we get upset about the way someone in one of these parables acts, Jesus holds up the mirror.

Time to examine ourselves. We know our Master has given generously to us. Maybe we don’t feel like we’ve been given so much more than others, we’re not the 5 talent people. Maybe the 2 talent group... but more likely we see ourselves as the one talent group. God has given generously to us – but not so much more than others. Either way – it’s interesting to note that the unfaithful one in the parable was not the one who was given everything – but the more normal one, the one more like us.

And before we try to deflect the mirror saying that, “we’re no evil servant, maybe not the best, but certainly not evil. We’re not wicked,” notice...this third servant wasn’t unfaithful by using his gifts for evil. He was unfaithful for not using his gifts for his Master.

The application slaps us in the face, doesn’t it? No matter what your gifts may be, you are to use them faithfully, in service of your Master. Your gifts may be different than someone else’s. Your gifts may be less than someone else’s. But each one of you has gifts—gifts especially entrusted to you from God! Be faithful with what you do have. That is what Jesus expects, and that should be our goal!

Probably the place it is easiest to self-evaluate (just because it is numerically quantifiable) is in the area of our offerings. How easy it is to make excuses! For those with fewer gifts: “I do not have much. Let those with greater gifts than I have support the church. I have nothing to give!” For those with greater gifts: “So what if I’ve been blessed with 20 talents, and give as if I only had two. At least, I am giving *something!* Talk to those who give nothing. I am doing my share to meet the budget and then some!”

But what does the parable teach? Who cares what amount you've been given? Are you being faithful? And in the parable we see that such a big part of that is the attitude. What motivates you? Are you giving just to fill a need, to meet a budget, to run a church? Or are you excitedly bringing back to your Master as he returns the result of your hard work in using your gifts? "Look Master. I used what you gave me to make this!"

Here's how that can happen. Here is the only way that can happen: See the master in this parable. See who He is. And when the mirror shows your unworthiness to even be his servant...when the mirror shows you to be the one who should be thrown out into the darkness – come back to see your Master, who stepped in to your place; and he was thrown into the darkness of Calvary in your place; and he used His gifts as the truly good and faithful servant to earn your profit.

Jesus, our Lord and Master, has taken away all of our sins. His blood covers our unfaithfulness, along with our excuses and our lack of gratitude and generosity. And think of this. In doing all that, Jesus has made us more than his servants. Paul says, "**The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ**" (Romans 8:16-17).

We cling to the promise: "**There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 8:1). And in the cleansing flood of Jesus' blood, our lives of service, our use of our talents that he has given us, our offerings are placed on his altar in perfect joy

You are His gifted servant. Use those gifts with joy. And then, you'll never have to regret what might have been. In Christ, Amen.