

**Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish  
Saint Francisville, LA  
19 November 2017**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

In the Pacific Northwest there are three common plants that populate the hedgerows and fence-lines: blackberries, salmon berries, and brambles. All three grow naturally and fast, providing great shelter for all sorts of small animals. But not all three prove to be equally useful. In fact, Brambles bear no edible fruit at all, by all appearances the plants have all that is necessary to produce fruit, but they produce none. The second plant, Salmon berries, produce pretty salmon colored fruits that are beautiful to look at. Unfortunately, salmon berries are almost completely tasteless. The usefulness of the fruit is very limited. Blackberries, on the other hand, produce plump, dark fruit by late summer. Blackberries are incredibly useful for pies, jams and even wines. Not to mention the fact that they are delicious to eat right off the vine. Landscapers feel no qualms ripping out brambles and even salmon berries. But everyone wants to save black berries to guarantee a full harvest. It is their fruitfulness, as well as the versatility and flavor of their fruit, that encourages us to let them multiply and master their domain.

Today Jesus gives us a parable that is not about salvation, per se, but about what each of us is called by God to do as we await the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Parables about salvation make a point to tell us that we are all invited to the banquet, that we are all given salvation equally, that we are all called children of God, etc. This parable, however, makes a point in saying that Talents are given to us according to our ability. We are all saved equally, but we are given talents, not equally, but according to our abilities. Let us get into the parable. As a man was about to go on a journey, he trusts three of his servants with the task of managing his property. He gives one 5 Talents, another 2, and another 1. The word Talent here means a large amount of money. In fact, one talent would be the equivalent to between 75-96 pounds of silver. Now, at the average daily wage of one denarius per day, a person would have to work 20 years to save 1 Talent. So, in fact, he gives one of the servants the equivalent to 100 years worth of wages, another the equivalent to 40 years, and the last the equivalent to 20 years.

Right from the start we see the master's generosity. He lavishly provides for his servants and then he goes on his way without given specific instructions as to how the Talents were to be invested. The servants were to be responsible for the incredible sums entrusted to them, but they would have to use their industry, initiative, and risk-taking in order to produce results. We are told that the first two invested their Talents, while the third buried the money in the ground. The parable doesn't tell us how much the Master required in return, leaving the possibility open that even a small return on investment would be acceptable to him. What the parable does tell us is that the master was gone "A long time".

Eventually, perhaps when they least expected him, the Master returned to settle accounts. The one who was given five Talents is praised and given 5 more at first, and then an additional one. The one who produced two, likewise was praised and given two more Talents. The one who was given one talent, however, was severely criticized and punished for burying the money. I would like to analyze this brief interaction between the master and this servant:

Let me say a couple of things about the behavior of the third servant. It was a well known practice in Palestine to bury money in the ground to protect it from thieves, to prevent loss of value in unstable economies, or simply to save it for a future crisis. There were few banks and many people simply did not trust the bankers. So, this servant did the minimum expected of him, he protected his master's money. What may be subject to criticism here is the reasons for his behavior, more than the behavior itself. The servant tells the master, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

The servant acted not out of concern for the master's money, but out of fear. He views the master as a harsh man, as a merciless judge, as an inflexible task master, so he buries the Talent out of fear. He has an inadequate belief about the master. He does not think of the master's generosity: he was entrusted with a great sum of money, he was given freedom to invest at will and make a profit for himself and for his master, he was given "a long time" to produce results, etc. His view of his master is inadequate and it has become his reality. Perhaps there is a lesson for us here as well. I believe often God becomes for us what we believe God to be. I don't mean that we create God in our image, but rather that our inadequate beliefs about God affect our perception of God and we become unable to see the whole picture of who God is. As a commentator suggests, "For those who believe God to be gracious, giving, and forgiving; to

them God is that. For those who believe God to be hard, demanding, and judgmental; to them God is that.” ([www.crossmarks.com/brian/matt25x14.htm](http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/matt25x14.htm)).

We are told in the story that the master calls the servant, “wicked, lazy and worthless.” We are also told that he was judged and thrown “into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The parable makes no qualms about the fact that all of us have been gifted with the talents necessary to produce good fruit. We are all given whatever is necessary for us to become like the Blackberries in the Pacific Northwest. But, my friends many of us produce the minimum expected, if we produce anything at all. I know that among my Evangelical friends there is a fear to fall for a works-righteousness mentality that is not Biblical. Works righteousness is when you come to believe that you earn your own salvation through your good works, which is contrary to the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel tells us that by dying on the cross, Christ paid the price for our sins and acquired salvation for all of us. Salvation is a free gift from God through Christ which we obtain by faith. So, many believe that doing good works means that we are trying to earn our salvation and not accepting Christ’s free gift.

I believe this view is a misunderstanding of the Gospel. This parable is not about our salvation, but rather about how we are to behave while we wait our Lord’s return. It is clear that our Lord expects us to produce good fruits. Good fruits are the result of our proper view of God and the result of our faith. A fully engaged Christian is called to have a fruit-full life and not a selfish, self-centered, self-directed life.

I pray today that each of us will accept God’s talents and that we invest those talents in such a way as to produce the fruit of the kingdom of God. I pray that all of us may lead lives filled with “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).