

Entrusted

Texts: I Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:14-30
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – November 15, 2020
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Business consultant James M. Bleech of Jacksonville, Florida, surveyed 110 executives to find out what excuses they hear most from their employees. Heading the list was “It’s not my fault.” The second-place excuse was “It was someone else’s fault.” Third, “Something else came up.” The fourth most often excuse was “I didn’t have time” followed by “We’ve never done it that way before” (not sure if he surveyed any churches with that one!). Other excuses were “No one told me to do it,” “I had too many interruptions,” “If only my supervisor really understood,” “I will get to it later,” and “No one showed me how to do it” (From Craig Brian Larson, ed. Contemporary Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers & Writers. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996. p. 64).

As I read over this list, I realized very quickly that I have used some of these excuses during my time working – and I got a little defensive that they were on the list. In my situation, my excuse was a valid one. It was not my fault. Or was it? In this morning’s Gospel lesson from Matthew, we have this third servant who gives excuses. At first glance, it may seem like he got what he deserved. But did he? And how do we look at this Scripture text in our own lives, as we consider today the idea of Stewardship?

A man goes on a journey. There is no indication in the passage of how long he will be gone or even if he is ever coming back. We have no idea where this journey is taking him. He calls his three servants together and gives them each a ridiculous amount of money. To put it into perspective, one talent of gold was the equivalent of 33 kilograms of gold. Based on the current price of gold today, the first servant who got five talents was entrusted with approximately \$9.9 million. The second servant, with two bags, had \$3.96 million in his care.

And the third servant, with just one talent, was responsible for approximately \$1.96 million.

Away goes the man – his future uncertain and unknown. After a long time – a LOOOONG time – the man returns to settle up his funds with the three servants. What did the three do with the ridiculous wealth given to their care? With the treasures entrusted to their keeping?

This passage, to me, reminds us of our need for stewardship. What is our response to God's ridiculous generosity of grace to us? What do we do with the bags of gold given to us by God out of His abundant nature? The valuable gifts of time and talents and treasures? It seems to me that this idea of stewardship is even more important this year. For our community needs to hear how ridiculously much God loves them. They need to hear, as we definitely need to be reminded as well, about the hope in Jesus Christ that can be theirs amidst these troubled times.

As we look ahead to the church's mission, both now and after the pandemic, I believe that things – that life – will look a lot differently. And I believe that we need to ask ourselves some questions in considering that. What treasures have you realized during these last 8 months? Is there a new talent or passion that you have acquired that your church can help you more fully realize? Have you discovered new ways that you can serve the Lord, ways to give back to God? As a church, where can we do ministry outside the box? Pandemic and quarantine has thrown that box away – obliterated it really. We are not longer being bound by burying ideas or areas because we were afraid to take a risk. Or worse yet, we have uttered that excuse, "We have never done it this way before." How do we manage God's abundant and more than ever needed grace to increase it in our lives and the lives of others?

You hear this morning that Stewardship letters and pledge cards will be going out soon. I encourage you to use this time to think, to pray, to reflect, and to discern how you will give back to God in the coming year – in the upcoming years. This church is so blessed to have such a

long history – 152 years, but whether we like it or not, change is coming. Change is here.

However, we have proven as a church family that we can be the church – we can do ministry and impact people’s lives with the Good News of Jesus Christ even when our building is closed.

Even when we are apart. We can reach out across cyberspace, worship together from different states across the county. We can serve our community and fellowship with one another.

Yes, I understand that looks different now. And it will probably continue to look different in our future. And yes, I agree that I would much rather be back in our building for worship, fellowship, study, and meetings. However, God has given us, even in these times, a ridiculously valuable gift, and in response to that gift, we must serve Him. We must give back. We are called to be good stewards of what He has bestowed on us.

So, we know what happens in the parable. The first two servants are praised and rewarded for their efforts in doubling what had been entrusted to them. But the third servant. It would be so easy to brush him off – to cast him into the darkness in the same way the man commanded that he be cast. He was afraid. He did not want to make a mistake and lose the man’s trust and confidence. I really feel sorry for him. I wish he had been able to overcome the obstacles of fear and uncertainty to try something – anything. For even a little bit, and he could have experienced so much more.

God does indeed expect much of us. We know that one day, we will all stand in judgment of our God, with Jesus at our side. “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” God wants us to succeed. God wants to bless our efforts in His name, even if we try only a little. Even if we give something. God shows up – and so must we.

You know, there is no more joy than when we serve together, when we fellowship and break bread together, and minister to and pray for and with one another. That is really why I put some of the group pictures in the opening slideshow. I wanted to remind you that we need to use the outrageous gift of grace God has given us – as we have in the past. Whether we are in person or on Zoom, whether we are socially distanced and masked or together and hugging each other, God has blessed us. He has given us His unconditional love and grace – the joy of the Lord is our strength for sure. And we have been entrusted.

Entrusted with grace. Entrusted with gifts to use and to share with others. Entrusted with the resources so that we – together as the Body of Christ – can reach out with the love of Jesus to help, support, affirm, and share. Entrusted to serve the Lord as elders, deacons, and servants of the Lord. Entrusted with time – and talents – and resources – to build up the kingdom of God here in this tiny village of Ringoes to Florida to Delaware to Michigan to Maryland to every other place where we are this morning in our Zoom worship.

How do we – together – realize God’s potential for our church? Let us be good and faithful servants in our response to what God has entrusted to us. Let us give – joyfully and fully – to the work of Jesus Christ. Let us pray...

Generous God, we give You thanks for Your provision and faithfulness to our church for the last 152 years. We thank You for the ways You have sustained us and allowed us to do ministry despite pandemic and isolation. We do long for that time when we can meet together again, but please show us how we can share what You have entrusted to us. Bless us, we pray in Christ’s name, Amen.