

Sunday, March 31, 2019 Sermon: Matthew 25:14-30 First Lutheran Church, Aitkin  
Pastor Doug Larson

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and savior,  
Jesus the Christ. Amen

Ole and Sven went out fishing. They found a place, dropped anchor and Sven puts a worm on his hook, attaches the bobber and casts it out. He looks over at Ole who is getting something out of a pack. He sees it is a stick of dynamite that Ole lights and throws out on the water. There is a big explosion and fish start coming up. Sven is shocked and starts telling Ole that it's illegal and he is flabbergasted to see Ole do that and he just can't do that. Ole reaches into his pack for another stick of dynamite, lights it and hands it to Sven, saying, "So Sven, what you gonna to do, you gonna talk or are you gonna fish?" Sven realizes he has to do something.

My mother was being given an intake interview as she moved into a nursing facility. The staff person asked what they should do if they came into her room and found her unresponsive. My mother asked what they meant. Well, what should we do and she said, "Something, anything and quickly!" She wanted them to do something.

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells another parable about a man going on a journey and giving three of his servants various amounts of money. Take care of this until I return, he said. The first two took the money, traded with it, invested it and doubled the amount. The third buried his money in the ground. When the master returned he called the three to meet with him. He asked what they had done.

The first two told him they invested the money and it had doubled. The master said to them, well done good and faithful servants, you have done well with this amount, I will put you in charge of more. The third came forward and said I knew you were a demanding person and I didn't want to lose this, so I buried it and here it is just like you gave it to me. The master said, "You wicked and lazy servant. You knew I was demanding and that I reaped where I didn't sow and you still just buried this money." He had the servant thrown out where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's interesting that the word for the money is the same word we have for our gifts, interests, abilities or our talents in life. Jesus is telling us that we have been given talents to use in life and that He expects us to use them, not bury them. Who of us would want to meet Jesus in the halls of heaven and have to tell him we just buried the talents He gave us. Uffda!

For years I have wondered what would have happened if there was a fourth servant in the parable that was given three talents? What if he or she took them, invested and traded with them and as it turns out, lost all. What would the master say to them? Would it be, "Thank you for trying, that's what I wanted you to do, at least try something."

I think of a seminary intern that I worked with. He said as part of the internship experience that he wanted to try chanting in the service. So we tried and he was awful. He didn't get any better and after six weeks I said he had to quit. He had a beautiful speaking voice with character and flavor and just saying the Kyrie sounded good. He tried and it didn't work, but he tried and that was important. I have

another friend who loves to sing but has a terrible voice. He knows he doesn't sound good, but he keeps singing the hymns and songs with the congregation and that is okay.

There used to be a commercial that said a mind is a terrible thing to waste. The gifts that God has given us are terrible things to waste. Because he tried to use his gifts, Jonas Salk discovered a vaccine for polio. Alexander Fleming used his gifts to develop penicillin. I think of a boy in one of my congregations who was in Confirmation when I came there. He attended church only enough to get his sermon notes. But one day when he was just in his early twenties, I asked him about serving on a church board. He asked more questions and agreed. As of a couple years ago, he was still serving on a board in the church. He used his talents. I think of another person who was on the Stewardship board but one night he asked if he could get off the board. He said he wasn't a meeting kind of person and felt it didn't fit him. But he said, he would be willing to do anything else when help was needed. I said of course you can change and true to his word, he helped gladly in other areas.

The point of Jesus' parable to us is that He expects us to do something with what He has given us. We are to try. Now in this interim period an interesting phenomenon occurs. There are people who as long as Pastor Darrell asked them to help would say yes. At the same time, they might be thinking that whenever Pastor Darrell leaves they might back off, having worked hard up to that point. And there are people in the church who might be saying that it seems the church has enough helpers now, but when Pastor Darrell leaves and a new pastor comes, they might like to get more involved and will step forward. We are in that time now that we might be thinking some of these thoughts.

There are many of you who have been using your talents in your home, your job and in your church. You have been good and faithful servants and can say like the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." There are others who have used their talents and want to continue because that seems right to them. That is good too!

And there are some of you who are waiting, watching and itching to get more involved. You may not be sure how or where, but you are ready to do more. If you aren't sure, you can ask Pastor Jordan, me, leaders of ministries or the new pastor when they come. You will be taking Jesus' command to do something, seriously. It is also possible that some of you want to do something but are feeling "burned". You volunteered and the whole job was dumped on you. You didn't have the training or enough information. You might have felt like a person who wanted to sail a boat, who was plunked in the stern of the boat, told to steer but didn't know what to do with the sail full of air—and off you go! So you are leery.

This church has a Strategic Plan that addresses that. This church knows it has to do more in training people to do the jobs that are needed. The Church Council is committed to helping all who are involved to be trained so they can feel comfortable, confident and able to do what needs to be done. I remember my first day driving truck in the field for harvest. I was fourth grade or fifth. I was told not to lock the starter and not to boil over the radiators. I wasn't told how not to do those things. I lived in fear. I only lasted that one day but over the next two years when I was in the field, I kept fearing that I would fail. I needed more training. We will help with that from now on here.

This congregation, First Lutheran Church needs helpers, many of them. But it may sound like the church is divided up this way: the pastors, the office staff, the Council, the volunteers and then the rest

who only have to sit and watch. It's not that way. According to Jesus' parable, we have all been given talents, according to how Jesus assigns them to us. We are all responsible to use what Jesus has given us. We can't sit and watch. An interesting idea at one of the "Who Are We Now" sessions was that everyone in the church had to help with at least one activity per year. Think about that.

In this interim time it may be that there are some who have been using their talents and now want to rest a bit and that is all right. There are others who want to continue doing what they are doing and that is wonderful. There are others who may be itching to do more, to get more involved, and to get into helping in some ministry or program that makes them feel like they are touching lives in one way or another. There are places for you.

I think of a person who filled in as a Confirmation mentor once in a while and invariably, ended up talking with a student in some very powerful and meaningful times. He was surprised but thankful to be there. I know that being an usher with a smile and a "how are you" attitude and greeting makes the day for some coming to church. I know that those who help behind the scenes truly do make a difference in how things happen. So we are to take our talents and use them! And let Jesus make them a blessing for His mission. Amen