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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

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PASTOR MARK FRY

1 THE COURT: It's a wonderful Sunday today, so we are
2 going to take a look at a wonderful Bible story from the
3 Gospel of Matthew.

4 We have Bibles out there. We would love for you to
5 use ours if you didn't bring yours.

6 If you brought yours, wonderful, keep bringing it,
7 you can write in yours, and ours we prefer you not write in,
8 but if the Spirit leads you to write in it, go right ahead.

9 We are going to be looking at a wonderful story from
10 Matthew 25.

11 There are four gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke
12 and John and we are going to be diving into Matthew this
13 morning and where we are diving in you need to know a little
14 bit of the context.

15 In my Bible it's on page 26 and 27. Yours might
16 have a different page numbering system.

17 But in this 25th chapter of Matthew it's very, very
18 late in Jesus' life.

19 He has been walking with the disciples for three
20 years, and so just by the sheer number of chapters the
21 intensity level is high.

22 He has been with them throughout life and now it's
23 getting down to literally the last few days of our Lord's
24 life and so he's going to raise the stakes a little bit and
25 he's going to teach them through some parables. That's a

1 story that has a truth beyond itself.

2 And we see in the 25th chapter the first parable
3 that he tells is a parable about preparation.

4 It's a parable about these ten young maidens being
5 prepared.

6 They are supposed to have enough oil in their lamps
7 for when the bridegroom comes back.

8 So if we had the time we would read that, Verses 1
9 through 13.

10 Then we are jumping into the story then at the 14th
11 verse.

12 This is another parable then that Jesus is telling
13 just before his last few days on earth before he dies.

14 For it is as if a man, going on a long journey,
15 summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them.

16 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to
17 another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went
18 away.

19 The one who had received the five talents went off
20 at once and traded with them and made five more talents.

21 In the same way the one who had the two talents made
22 two more talents.

23 But the one who had received the one talent went off
24 and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

25 After a long time the master of those slaves came

1 and settled accounts with them.

2 When the one who had received the five talents came
3 forward bringing five more talents saying, "Master, you
4 handed over to me five talents. See, I've made five more
5 talents."

6 His master said to him, "Well done, good and
7 trustworthy slave. You've been trustworthy in a few things.
8 I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy
9 of your master."

10 And the one with the two talents also came forward
11 saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents and I've
12 made two more talents."

13 His master said to him, "Well done, good and
14 trustworthy slave, you've been trustworthy in a few things.
15 I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy
16 of your master."

17 Then the one who had received the one talent also
18 came forward saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh
19 man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you
20 did not scatter seed, so I was afraid, and I went off and hid
21 your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

22 But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave.
23 You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather
24 where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my
25 money with the bankers and on my return I would have received

1 what was my own with interest."

2 "So take the talents from him," he said, "and give
3 it to the one with the ten. For to all those who have, more
4 will be given and they will have an abundance, but those who
5 have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for
6 this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness where
7 there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

8 This is the Gospel of our Lord.

9 Wow. That kind of lets the old air out of the
10 balloon, doesn't it?

11 Weeping and gnashing of teeth for a bad investment
12 process.

13 We need to look at this parable a little bit and see
14 what it's talking about, because I do want you to get some
15 sleep today, but not too much.

16 But Matthew 25, let's take a look. As I set the
17 stage, we did have this wonderful story in the first part
18 about the ten maidens.

19 And then we have this parable late in there and then
20 the very next parable is going to be a parable about
21 separation of the sheep and the goats.

22 Basically Jesus is going to talk in that one about
23 you are going to come and I'm going to ask you a few
24 questions and we're going to determine if you were on the bus
25 or not.

1 And if you have acted like sheep, but haven't been
2 one, all of a sudden you're going to become a goat and then
3 there is going to be this separation anxiety and weeping and
4 gnashing of teeth and you are going to be banished to the
5 outer darkness, too.

6 This is just a couple days before Passover. He's
7 getting ready to have the Last Supper with the disciples. So
8 that is the context.

9 The master has given each of these three servants a
10 tremendous gift.

11 We need to understand a little bit about this talent
12 business here and then we need to zoom in real closely.

13 If I was marking my own Bible, as I've done here, in
14 Verse 15 I would circle according to his ability.

15 Because what is happening here is a man is going on
16 a journey, and what Jesus is doing is he's talking about
17 himself. He says I'm getting ready to go die.

18 So he's preparing and he's prophesying his own
19 death.

20 And some people have misinterpreted this to say he's
21 going on this short journey and he'll be back in three days.

22 No, he's getting ready to go on a journey, and he'll
23 come back some day, we don't know when, but the point is he's
24 talking about himself and he's getting ready to go.

25 And it says he gave out this gift of money to these

1 three servants according to their ability.

2 It wasn't that the father had all this money he gave
3 according to his ability.

4 It was according to each of these three male slaves'
5 ability.

6 Notice he doesn't give any guidelines. He just
7 gives them five talents, two talents, one talent.

8 Here's is what you need to know. One talent is
9 worth fifteen years of salary. Fifteen years.

10 Two talents would be thirty years.

11 Five talents would be five times fifteen years of
12 salary.

13 This is a tremendous amount of money he's giving to
14 all three of these servants.

15 But notice he doesn't give them any instructions.
16 It's as though he's saying I trust you. Be creative.

17 He doesn't say now take this and put it on a horse.

18 He doesn't say take this and put it on this really
19 hot stock tip.

20 He doesn't say take this and invest it in the
21 housing market.

22 He just says here. Be creative. I trust you.

23 And what the parable then does is it explains
24 exactly what the return on investment is going to look like.

25 The first and the second servant earn huge amounts.

1 They double what he gave them.

2 Think of that.

3 Two talents, thirty years worth of salary, he
4 doubled it.

5 Five years worth of salary, he doubled it. He has
6 now ten years worth.

7 All of those years of incredible blessing. These
8 are huge amounts of return.

9 But this third servant panics and does nothing.

10 So we need to look at the responses of these three
11 servants.

12 The first one is recorded there in 25:20. The one
13 who had received the five came forward, bringing five talents
14 more, and he said, "Master, you handed over to me five
15 talents. See, I've made five more."

16 The translation of the words handed over is
17 entrusted.

18 In other words, what he's saying is, master, you
19 trusted me, and I'm going to give back double what you gave
20 me.

21 You handed over freely. There were no strings
22 attached. This incredible generosity.

23 And the second servants, in the same exact words,
24 you trusted me, you handed over to me two talents, Verse 23,
25 his master said, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave,

1 you've been trustworthy in a few things," way to go. Way to
2 go. But notice that master, you entrusted me.

3 Now we zoom in on the third servant's response and
4 it's entirely different.

5 Verse 24, he said, "I knew that you were a harsh
6 man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you
7 did not scatter seeds, and I was afraid, so I went and hid
8 your talent in the ground."

9 How did he know that? He said, "I knew you were a
10 harsh man, reaping where you did not sow."

11 Where does he get that? I know a lot of disciples,
12 sheep, who have that notion of the master, that he's a harsh
13 man, that it's not his stuff in the first place; it's theirs.

14 But, you see, what happens very, very subtly in this
15 is that fear creeps in and the fear is over the relationship
16 with the master.

17 And this third servant tries to reduce God to a
18 banker.

19 He tries to reduce the master to a cop or an
20 investment specialist. God will not be reduced to that.

21 He gave according to the servants' ability; not
22 according to his own generosity, but he is incredibly
23 generous, so we need to unpack that a little bit.

24 But misunderstanding the master is a major problem,
25 and not only is it a fatal problem, but it also is a

1 eternally fatal problem.

2 And I know a whole lot of people that they have an
3 understanding of God as a harsh man; that he's the got an
4 anvil hanging over them and it's like that old "Far Side"
5 cartoon where God is sitting at the computer with a really
6 long beard and some dumb schmuck is walking down the street
7 with an anvil over his head and there is a key on the
8 keyboard that says smite and he's getting ready to drop an
9 anvil right on the dude's head.

10 That's the third servant. I knew you were a harsh
11 man.

12 And then you see what he does is really interesting,
13 he takes it then to another level of thinking God was like a
14 vending machine; that he only needed him in the bad times.
15 That's not the deal.

16 I just re-read a book, Henry Nouwan's "Return of the
17 Prodigal Son", it's a fabulous read, we did a thing on it a
18 few weeks ago and I use it as part of my morning reading.

19 Here is a quote from Professor Nouwan. He says, "As
20 long as I kept looking at God as a landowner, as a father who
21 wants to get the most out of me for the least amount, I
22 cannot but become jealous, bitter, and resentful toward my
23 fellow workers or my brothers and sisters.

24 "But if I am able to look at the world with the eyes
25 of God's love, I discover that God's vision is not that of a

1 stereotypical landowner, or patriarch, but rather that of an
2 all-forgiving, all-giving father who does not measure out his
3 love to his children according to how well they behave, then
4 I quickly see that my only true response can be of deep
5 gratitude."

6 It's attitude that it's not my stuff anyway. God is
7 not a banker or a cop or an economist.

8 He's a gracious parent. He's not a harsh man.

9 Notice when he says that, it's the servant's
10 projection onto the father. I knew you were a harsh man.

11 In other words, he's the harsh man. He's the
12 tightwad. He's the unproductive one.

13 He's the one who has such close ties on the purse
14 string; not the father, the master. The master is incredibly
15 generous.

16 The servant became what he projected the master was.
17 I knew you were a harsh man and I was afraid.

18 Where did he get that? Where do we get that fear
19 thing? Some have gotten it from a blame-shame game.

20 The parable teaches us that denial is not just a
21 river in Egypt, it's also a hole in the backyard.

22 A lot of us bury that crap for years. Then all of a
23 sudden it comes out when it gets hot, I knew you were a harsh
24 man, I was afraid.

25 Toxic worry, they call it. They call it fatalism.

1 They call it fear of the future, instead of embracing it as
2 an opportunity of investment there in the future that this
3 guy just will not make, and yet the master keeps giving out
4 these incredible blessings.

5 The third servant is guilty of paralysis by
6 analysis.

7 Instead of being motivated by worry and opportunity,
8 he's paralyzed by it. He buries it. He puts it in his
9 backyard.

10 He's absolutely paralyzed by the opportunity that
11 God has given him to do something with his life.

12 He just buries it. He's afraid of life. He's
13 afraid of the giver of life.

14 And if we look at that I was afraid verse, if you
15 want a fun Bible study, just go back and look at all the
16 different times people were afraid.

17 The first time is right in the Garden of Eden.
18 Adam's first words out of his mouth, he's filled with shame
19 in his own backyard, God says where were you, and he says I
20 was afraid, covers himself up because of his shame, deferring
21 his leadership ability.

22 The next time the word fear comes in is when the
23 Israelites are leaving Pharaoh.

24 It says in the Bible they were afraid to cross the
25 Red Sea, even though life with Pharaoh had been horrible, but

1 they were afraid. Isn't that interesting?

2 I knew you were a harsh man. No, that was Pharaoh;
3 that's not me.

4 Why are you afraid? Where is that coming from?
5 Where are you getting this fear factor of God thing?

6 Is it your own shame and blame game of what you're
7 playing?

8 But he's afraid of all this stuff.

9 We learn that effectiveness as Christians is
10 measured in this story.

11 That is kind of a scary thought for some Lutherans.
12 I know an awful lot of people that have a fear factor notion
13 of God and they are just kind of, well, I'm saved by grace.

14 Yes, you are. What are you going to do with it?
15 What are we going to do with it?

16 Effectiveness is measured, and it's very clear that
17 what God has given you, there's an expectation of response.

18 And if it's five, then he expects five back more.

19 Two, he expects two back more.

20 One, don't just bury it in the ground. At least
21 take it to the bank and get some interest.

22 But people just aren't interested in the interest.
23 Look at these three servants. They are incredibly amazing.

24 The master is understood as harsh by the third
25 servant.

1 The rest of these understood him as a pushover. He
2 doesn't expect anything of me. I'm one of his kids.

3 What kind of a parent would that be? He's not a
4 harsh man, but he's not a stupid man; smartest man that ever
5 lived, Jesus.

6 Relationship to God is one of trust, not thrust.
7 The word that is key to this is entrusted.

8 I trusted you with this God says to these servants,
9 and be creative with it.

10 Don't be paralyzed by what God has given you; be
11 creative with it.

12 The master then uses his own words. It's
13 fascinating, in the 26th verse he comes in and he goes you
14 wicked and lazy, you knew, did you?

15 As if to say, you knew that? Where did you get
16 that? Did they teach you that at school?

17 You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow
18 and gather what I didn't scatter?

19 Are you kidding me? Who has been teaching you? All
20 this stuff is mine, is what he's saying.

21 Where did you learn that? Is that part of your fear
22 factor thing, that you think the house you have, the car you
23 drive, the money you make is yours?

24 It isn't. It's all mine. I scatter it. Who told
25 you that it's not mine? That's wrong.

1 And then he gets real harsh with him. He said you
2 were afraid?

3 Well, gee, you could have at least gone to the bank,
4 at least done that.

5 But the third servant keeps his worry to himself and
6 he buries it.

7 It's okay to be afraid, but talk about it. That's
8 how worry becomes toxic, it becomes fatal, it becomes
9 isolation, it becomes this cancer that grows inside of us and
10 then all of a sudden when the most slightest bit of
11 discomfort comes out then we start blaming and shaming and
12 naming God as a harsh man.

13 It's a fascinating story. I love this story.

14 Again, it's important to realize that a talent is
15 worth fifteen years worth of wages.

16 So the first servant gets five times fifteen. What
17 is that? Seventy-five years of salary.

18 The other guy gets thirty.

19 The other guys gets fifteen years of a paycheck.

20 That's a tremendous amount of money. It speaks to
21 God's extravagance; not God's harshness.

22 And the first two prove trustworthy. Their response
23 is one of abundance instead of scarcity.

24 That's another thing the Bible is very clear on, is
25 that people who have this fear notion of God, they think you

1 have to put it all away in extra barns and stuff, and this is
2 really a story of abundance instead of scarcity.

3 So remember the context. Right after the virgin
4 thing about the ten maidens and preparedness, and then this,
5 and then we are going to have the sheep and goats thing that
6 is going to happen.

7 Barb came to me, and a family from Bethany came to
8 me about three or four weeks ago with a tremendously generous
9 idea.

10 They don't want to be recognized, but they had heard
11 of another church that had done something incredible with
12 this investment parable, of giving people money and seeing
13 what they could do with it.

14 And so we are going to do that today, if the ushers
15 can come up here.

16 This family, amazing generosity, they have little
17 kids, this is a family that just thought this is such a cool
18 idea, we just want to do it because we heard somebody else
19 did it.

20 They gave ten thousand dollars and they just said
21 give it away, like this parable.

22 So what Barb did, she's a former math teacher, she
23 got her slide rule out, or whatever she used, and figured out
24 how to divide this thing up.

25 I have this spread sheet of what all this money is.

1 She went and got 470 twenty dollar bills, and 5 one hundred
2 dollar bills, and then divided it up into a whole bunch of
3 envelopes.

4 There are a bunch of envelopes sitting over here in
5 the front.

6 It was really interesting to me, we have some people
7 at our 7:45 service that were there today and we were handing
8 these out, no questions asked, just be creative, do something
9 with this.

10 You either got \$20, \$40, \$60 or \$100, and so in six
11 weeks on May 27th what we want to do is we want to see how
12 creative you were and how well you did.

13 And they told Barb all these wonderful stories, in
14 the church somebody got such and such, they bought stationery
15 and stamps and envelopes and wrote letters to family and told
16 about the church, and people are sending back tremendous
17 amounts of money, what a great idea, with just the cost of a
18 stamp and writing a letter.

19 Other people had lemonade stands. Instead of
20 raising money, they are buying lemonade with the money they
21 had to do it, or buying a bunch of things to make clothing
22 and selling it.

23 We had dinner with a friend in Washington, D.C.,
24 last week.

25 He pays for his whole family vacation every year by

1 selling flowers.

2 They buy flowers in bulk and they put them in
3 bouquets and sell them and then they just use that as a
4 family vacation. Very creative.

5 The point being, we don't want anybody to do
6 anything stupid or dangerous, but be creative. We trust you,
7 God trusts you.

8 It was interesting, because somebody at the 7:45
9 service said I don't want one of those.

10 I just kind of looked at them. Are you serious?
11 They aren't even on the chart of the three servants, to say I
12 don't want it.

13 I'm not going to play your game, is what their body
14 language said.

15 It's not a game. This is about receiving. You
16 don't have to do this.

17 If you want to go to Starbucks and blow the whole
18 thing, go for it.

19 But, again, effectiveness as Christians seems to be
20 mentioned in the Bible.

21 We are going to give you these. We just trust you.
22 That's not meant to be a threat as much as have some fun with
23 this.

24 I have so much joy. God just keeps pouring stuff on
25 me. It's kind of scary. Really scary.

1 But what do we do with it, see, instead of burying
2 it in the backyard, or letting it sit in our hearts without
3 using it.

4 We'll distribute these things. We thought it would
5 be fun today to do this.

6 And you can have one per family unit, and if you
7 have a family and you have a real prophetic little person, or
8 not so little person, I would like to do my own, then do your
9 own, wonderful, praise the Lord, but it might be a cool
10 family project.

11 You are going to be getting either \$20, \$40, \$60 or
12 \$100.

13 I would encourage you not to open it here, but you
14 can, you can open it, but my reason for that is you might
15 want to go home and have a family meeting, let's see how much
16 we got, and then let's figure out what we are going to do
17 with it.

18 And if you're like me, you have been given a bunch
19 of talents, so these are being distributed, be creative, be
20 generous.

21 We'll ask you to bring these back on May 27th, six
22 weeks from today.

23 The family that was telling the story, when I meet
24 them in the lobby one night, they were here on a Wednesday
25 night, and he told about it, he said what he had heard in

1 this other church was somebody was so overwhelmed by it they
2 doubled the amount right up front, and so they sent back the
3 total amount somebody gave.

4 It's just a gesture of a Biblical truth, and here
5 the other thing, is that God trusts you, probably more than I
6 do to be creative, because I'm still reeling a little bit
7 from the person who said no, I'm not going to play your game.

8 Thank you, Lord, that we can receive your gifts,
9 that we can hand them on, Lord.

10 You have showered your mercy on us. We pray your
11 blessing on these little gifts.

12 I wish we could give everybody in this room fifteen
13 thousand dollars.

14 I wish we could give everybody here, Lord, five
15 talents, seventy-five years worth of salary, so that they
16 could go out and double it and bring it back to you.

17 Lord, I apologize that we need to put a time
18 constraint on this, we don't know when you're coming back
19 from your journey, but we know that you're with us.

20 So be creative in the families that receive these
21 envelopes, Lord, and work your miraculous math so that we can
22 be surprised, so that we can be blessed, be a blessing.

23 Again, Lord, I thank you for the young disciples
24 today that stood up here, that lit these little candles, that
25 touched this water, that handed out roses to people that have

1 been of support to them.

2 And, Lord, may these envelopes be little candles in
3 a dark world.

4 Thank you for letting us be together to celebrate.
5 Thank you for blessing us so richly. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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