

Father, we thank you for this kingdom that we've just been singing about, your kingdom. We thank you for your teaching in scripture, that we have the blessing of, of learning from and hearing your word. Spirit, I pray that you would encourage and challenge and correct us this morning through your word. In your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Well, Covenant Family, you know that we have been preaching through a series of parables that Jesus tells in response to his disciples asking the question, this question about his kingdom, saying, how long will we wait? When will we know when your kingdom is coming? I thought about that question as I was hearing some stories last week in our Engage Global Mission celebration.

And in one of the breakouts, I heard one of our missionaries in Romania named Paola sharing stories about her ministry to some Ukrainian refugees and hearing some of the trauma they had experienced, some of the unspeakable things that they had seen and now coming to be cared for in this ministry that Florine and Paula lead. And my heart broke thinking of the realities, the horrific realities of war. And it's not just war in Russia and Ukraine, but it's war in Iran and Israel. It's corruption in governments like South Sudan and Somalia and Syria and Venezuela and North Korea, it's poverty in Kenya, it's human trafficking worldwide. It's right here in Tippecanoe County.

As we think about crisis and trouble like the housing crisis, a lack of housing for lack of low income housing options, we think of the child abuse and neglect going on here in our community, addictions and mental illness, all of these things can and should raise up this question in us that says, lord, what will be the sign that the waiting is over and your kingdom will come? You know, all of those things. And then I realize for me on a daily basis, what is drawing forth that question in me is. And some this is just selfishness, and some this is where my attention lies on a daily basis, as yours might as well as I think about just my own relational conflict or illness of loved ones or general life stress. And those are the things on a daily basis that draw up this question, saying, lord, what will be the sign that our waiting is over and your kingdom is coming?

So that's why Jesus tells this parable in response to that question. So he's talking to his disciples. And we see in this parable is recorded in Matthew 25, verses 14 through 30. And I encourage you to go there. I'm going to tell you the parable and I just want you to listen.

But Then throughout the rest of the sermon, I'd love for you to be able to have it in front of you and refer to it. It's Matthew 25, verses 14 through 30. And Jesus tells his disciples this as he illustrates the kingdom of God. He says, it's like a man who is about to go on a journey. And before he goes on a journey, he calls his servants to him, and he entrusts his wealth to them.

To one servant he gives five talents, or bags of gold, depending on the translation that you're reading. To another servant, he gives two talents or bags of gold. And to a third servant, he gives one talent or bag of gold. So when the first servant receives these five talents, it says, he went out at once, and he put that to work for his master, and he gained five more. Then the second servant, who received two talents, he went out at once, and he put what he had been entrusted to him.

He put it to work for for his master, and received two more. Gained two more talents. For the third servant who had received one talent. He buried it immediately to protect himself, so as not to lose what had been entrusted to him. So the master returned sometime later, and he called the servants back to him.

And the servant who had received five talents came to the master, and he said, you have given me these five talents, and I put them to to work for you and gained you five more. And the master looked at his servant and he said, well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with what I have given you, and now I will entrust to you much more. Come, join in your master's happiness. And to the second servant, he came before the king, and he said, you had given me two talents, and I put them to work for you, and I gained for you two more.

And the master said, well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things, and I will now entrust you with much more. Come and join in your master's happiness. And then he called the third servant, and we'll read what he says to the third servant in verse 24. Then the man who had received the one bag of gold came.

Master, he said, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you. His master replied, you wicked and lazy servant. So you knew I harvest where I have not sown and gathered where I have not scattered seed.

Well, then you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest. So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has 10 bags. For whoever has will be given more and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It's a pretty strong reaction to the third servant. And this is a pretty clear message that is communicated through this parable. Here's what we should do while we're waiting. Invest what the master has given you to grow his kingdom. And here's what happens when the master returns.

The faithful will join the master in the banquet and share in his joy. And the unfaithful will not. So his disciples received this as a call to action and a warning against inaction. They received this as a promise of an amazing reward.

So what I want to do now we see how the disciples received it. I want to try this parable on for us to see and consider what it is teaching to us. So the parable starts with a master, right? And he's giving talents, these talents to his servants. Talents, or it's translated bags of gold.

The Greek term talent, it actually is a. It's a unit of measurement. And a lot of scholars agree that that one talent would have been around 20 years wages. So that's pretty significant. So very conservatively, if we put that in our terms today, one talent would be actually more than a million dollars.

But for simplicity, let's just say one talent is \$1 million. So incidentally, as well, the Greek word talent, our word talent, in English today, that means skills and abilities. Our word talent comes from the Greek word that is translated talent and is used in this parable. So the master gives \$5 million to the first servant, \$2 million to the second servant, and entrusts \$1 million to the third servant. So the question that is good for us to ask is what has our Master entrusted to us?

I think the Bible teaches clearly that our Master is our God who created us. So what is our God who created us? What is he given to us? What has he entrusted to us? And the first thing that comes to mind is our body.

He's given us this body, which when we think about it, this is the most incredible tool in all of creation. All that our body can do. And he's not just given us these bodies, but he's created us in his image. That is, we have a soul and we have the ability to have relationship with the God of the universe. So he's given us body and soul.

He's given us time and skills and resources. So we have this master who has entrusted us with an astounding amount of riches in our body and our soul and our time and our skills and our resources. So as we continue to try this parable on, I want to kind of ground it in two principles that we recognize. The first is this, that all that we have is gift from our master.

So this is a similar foundational principle that we talked about a lot in our gratitude sermon series. All that we have is gift from our master. And secondly, our master is a God of abundance beyond our measure. So if this God of abundance gave me this body and soul and time and skills and resources, it blows my mind to think not only has he given me that, but he's given every person in this room, body, soul, time, skill and resources. He's given every man and woman and child in this community around the world throughout all time, body, soul, time and skills and resources.

That is a God of immeasurable abundance. So we have this God. All that we have is gift from our master. Our master is a God of abundance beyond measure. So let's notice a few things about these three servants.

First, we'll look at the first two. So the first two servants, they went out at once and they put their talents to work. So whose talents and what work? Whose talents? Well, they're God's talents, right?

The master's talents entrusted to the servants. So they put them to work. Wasn't their talents, it's not our talents, it's God's talents entrusted to us. And what is the work? The work is that of expanding his kingdom.

So what does it mean to expand his kingdom? We think about? Well, if his kingdom is his bringing his justice and his peace, his justice and his peace reigns. That's where his kingdom is. So for me to expand his kingdom, that happens when we are signs and foretaste of his justice and his peace.

So when we live in such a way to be signs and foretaste of his just and his peace, the reign of those things, we are expanding his kingdom. So it's his talents put to work to grow his kingdom. Notice the posture of those first two servants. Their hands are open. What he has entrusted to them, they recognize as his and they use for his kingdom work.

So is that our posture with our talents, with our time and our skills and our Resources that the Lord has entrusted to us. I think about again, back to our mission celebration last weekend. The Florine who shared here in the service, and Paola, his wife. We think about the ministry they have in Romania and they have a ministry serving the Gypsy people. And they begin to have interactions with Ukrainian refugees.

And they say, all right, God, this is your time, your skills, your resources, and we want to use them for your work. So they grow and expand their ministry to minister to Ukrainian refugees as well as the Gypsy people. I think of Rob Donaldson, who is a member here at our church family, and he retired from a career in business and now volunteers many hours a week to serve as our operations manager. He's giving his time and skills and resources for God's work here in this place. I think of our many, many next gen volunteers, more than 70 men and women on a weekly basis who serve in our kids ministry with kindergarteners and preschoolers and, and babies and elementary school students and others that serve as small group leaders of middle school students and high school students and the ways that these men and women are using their time and their skills and their resources for his kingdom work.

I think of other business owners, people in different walks of life, and professors here in the community. And the creative ways that I hear the, that you are using your time and your skills and your resources to grow God's kingdom. I think of those of you in our church family with who God has blessed financially. And you give Even more than 10% of your financial resources to the work of this church family and the way that you are using those things to serve to forward God's kingdom. All of these being beautiful examples of these first two servants.

You receive what the Lord has entrusted to you and you use your time and your skills and your resources, handing them back to the Lord for his work. And then there's the third servant. So the third servant, he digs a hole and he hides these what has been entrusted to him because he was afraid. He focused on his, his safety over and above his master's gain. So, so I have this picture, this posture of his arms are closed and, and he's.

He's thinking about what's important to him. He's his own safety over his master's gain. And the question for us then is, is that our posture with our talents, with our time and our skills and our resources that the Lord has entrusted to us. Think about your time. You know, I think about the Lord's desire to spend time with me, each day with me, listening to Him Through His Word, he desires to spend that that time each day.

And, and what would it be like if we said to the Lord, if I said to the Lord, lord, thank you for the 48 years and counting of time that you've given me. I sure wish I had some time to spend with you. That would be a sad expression for me to give to the Lord. Am I using my time mostly for me or using it to work for his purposes? Think about your skills we're called in Scripture to use our skills to build up the body of Christ.

Think about the ways that you could volunteer in this church family as an usher or as I mentioned before, serving in our kids ministry or serving on our older adult visitation team. There are so many ways that you could give your skills to serve and volunteer in this church family. Are you using your skills mostly for yourself or to put to work for God's purposes in his kingdom? Or we think about our financial resources. Scripture gives us this example in teaching about tithing, which is giving 10% of our income back to the Lord.

And that is an act of obedience and an act of worship. So then we think about, Lord, am I using my financial resources

mostly for me or to share with you your gifts for your kingdom? Work honestly. When I think about it, these these three examples, spending time with God each day, employing some of our skills to build up the body of Christ and tithing from your income. These are actually they're training wheels in the process of learning how to use our talents to work for God's kingdom.

If you've mastered the riding these training wheels, then then I encourage you to take the next step to invest the time and the skills and the resources entrusted to you by the Master even more deeply. If you're not riding smoothly on these training wheels yet, as your pastor, I want to lovingly urge you start putting to work his talents for his purposes now before he returns. Don't be found saying, God, I appreciate what I received from you these time and these skills and these talents. And I've used them to take good care of myself.

Don't be like the third servant.

So consider the results as these servants come before their master. And the first two servants receive these words from the master where he says, well done, my good and faithful servant. I think that's something we all long to hear from the God who created us. Well done, my good and faithful servant. Just as a brief aside, I love to think about how when Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in this voice from God the Father, came down and he said, this is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.

And I think about this beautiful reality that as any of us place faith in Christ, we receive his Holy Spirit. And when we receive his Holy Spirit, as when Jesus received the Holy Spirit, we receive God's voice telling us, you, my Son or daughter. This is my son or daughter, in whom I am one well pleased. We receive that affirmation as we step into faith with Jesus. We have that affirmation echoing hopefully as you listen to the Spirit throughout your life.

And one day, when his kingdom comes and when we meet God face to face, we'll hear him say even more clearly than the echo that we've heard throughout our life in faith, we'll hear him tell us, well done, my good and faithful servant. May that be what we experience.

Come and share in your Master's happiness.

And then there's the third servant, the response that he has from the Master. The Master says, you wicked and lazy servant. And that servant is thrown out into the darkness. And honestly, we're a little shocked initially at the Master's anger with that servant. As I pondered that, I thought about.

I wonder if. If Jesus is thinking about the Pharisees and many others in past generations to whom were given the promises of God, the law of Moses, and the invitation to be a light to the Gentiles, and they had kept all, all those things for themselves, for their own good. And I realized that few things frustrated Jesus more than people who had received his gifts and kept those gifts for themselves for their own assumed benefit. Jesus has harsh words for the Pharisees who did this. Just as in this parable, the Master has harsh words for the unfaithful servant.

So in. In empathy, I found myself asking, well, well, how could that servant have known? How could he have known how the Master was going to respond? And, and that's a fair question, but I encourage you to don't. Don't spend too much time considering what the fictitious servant was experiencing.

But in this parable. But, but be concerned for the real person receiving this parable. That's you and me. We've received clear teaching, the clear teaching from this parable. How will we respond?

And what will we do with the talents that the Master has given us? Do we take those talents that we have received and with open hands say, I want to put these things to work for your good God? Or do we receive these talents that have been entrusted to us and closed? And we say, I receive these, and with them I take good care of me.

What is our response?

I want to spend a few minutes in prayer, and we'll eventually move into communion. But in prayer, I want you to

consider with the Lord and just spend a moment listening. How are you responding? What are you doing with the talents that he has entrusted to you?

Father, we come before you, and I pray in this moment. I pray that you would give us a special, almost overwhelming realization of your abundance of the incredible gifts, the time and the skills and the resources that you have entrusted to us. Show us in this moment the the extreme gift that that is.

Father, help us see that these are your skills and gifts and talents that you have entrusted to us.

And, Father, we take a moment to acknowledge before you, perhaps confess before you as we think about how we are using your talents for your work.

We consider that before you.