

## Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost A

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Psalm 90: 1-8, [9-11] 12

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

As I'm sure most of you know by now, I have been a tuba player since the sixth grade.

I played the tuba through all of high school, both in the marching band in the concert bands. This tuba was my graduation present.

In college, I continued to play the tuba and to take private lessons. I grew stronger and more competent every year. I was playing every day, and it felt *good*.

After I graduated from college, I moved a few times and began preparing for seminary. I no longer had a band to play in or a regular place to practice. I played less and less until I stopped playing altogether—not because I wanted to, but because circumstances prevented me from playing all the time.

I pick it up every now and then for special occasions, like playing with my old college groups or if the seminary needed me.

But that incredible skill I had built up was gone. The talent remained, and the knowledge, for sure. But my lips and lungs were no longer as strong. My tone was not as clear, my articulation sloppy.

Every time this has happened, it's crushed me. The gift of music is important to who I am. When I lose that ability... it's like losing a piece of myself.

When I don't use that gift, I start to lose it.

Jesus understood that a great gift was a terrible thing to waste.

In our parable this morning, three men are given great gifts.

A talent was not an ability, as we have come to understand it in English, but it was a *huge* sum of money. To receive five talents was an extravagant sum. To receive

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two was a great sum. And even to receive a single talent of money was an exceedingly large sum.

I'd like to point out the obvious—not every man receives an equal amount of money to deal with. Jesus tells us that to each was given “according to his ability.”

This may lead us to believe that the man who received the one talent really was of no worth at all. But remember, even one talent was a large sum of money to deal with.

With each gift comes responsibility. I can imagine that the man who received the five talents must have felt the pressure put on him by his master. So much could go wrong if he misused the gift he had been given.

The one with two talents, in the same way, understood how important it was to take advantage of the trust put in him by his master.

But the third—I wonder what goes through his mind.

It would be easy for him to notice that the next man up received TWICE as much as he did. TWICE. Not a little bit more, but a LOT more. He has one talent, yes, and a heavy talent it is... but he only gets HALF of the money the next guy gets? I'd probably feel discouraged to.

Not to mention what the last man thinks and feels about the master. He has heard so many rumors about his master.

He has heard Zephaniah cry out about the Great Day of the Lord,

A day of wrath  
A day of distress and anguish,  
A day of ruin and devastation,  
A day of darkness and gloom,  
A day of clouds and thick darkness.

What will this master DO to me if I lose the talent? What if it gets stolen? What if I am tricked out of it? What if I am not able to get as much back through trade, what if.... What if what if what if.

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The only way he can be sure that his talent will be safe is to hide it away, where no one will ever find it. He refuses to use the gift he has been given. And we know what happens to him at the end—he loses it anyway.

Here at First Lutheran, we just held our annual Stewardship drive, which included an evaluation of our time and talents. I have a feeling that many of us don't recognize the many talents we have been gifted.

"I'm not all that good," we say.

"Well I can do that, but this person can do it so much better than I can."

"I can do this, but it doesn't help anyone."

Or even, "I just don't have anything I'm good at."

Whether we have five talents, two, or just one, God has given each of us gifts to use. Every gift, every talent is important.

It is not enough to hold on to our gift.  
It is not enough to take the safe road.  
It is not enough not to take the risk.

God didn't give us our gifts to keep them safe for a while. God's gifts are given to be USED.

The five-talent man and two-talent man are not rewarded because of how much money they brought back to their master. They were rewarded because they took their gifts and took the risk. They all had equal opportunity and received equal reward.

It doesn't matter how much talent we have. What matters is that we use it.

There is no shortage of need in the world for the gifts of God. Go out and share them! Not because we are afraid of what will happen to us on the Great Day of the Lord. Paul makes it clear that we are not destined for destruction, but for salvation.

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No, go out and share them because you are NEEDED. You are NEEDED. No matter what your talent or calling, you are not irrelevant or unimportant.

God has given you a gift. There is no greater honor, and no higher responsibility. The Day of the Lord is near. And after all,

It's a great day to be alive  
I know the sun's still shinin' when I close my eye,  
There's some – hard times in the neighborhood,  
So why can't every day be just this good.