# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Three Servants”**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

 **October 23, 2022**

For well over one hundred years, members of our church have been receiving the blessings of God in their lives and have faithfully put them to use for his kingdom here in the Valley and beyond. This morning I want to thank you, our current congregation, for all the ways you faithfully use what God has given you to support the ministry of this church. The ongoing faithfulness of his people pleases God as Jesus makes clear in one of his parables. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 25:14-30

“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip. The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money. After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’ The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’ The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.’ The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’ Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn’t plant and gathering crops you didn’t cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’ But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn’t plant and gathered crops I didn’t cultivate, why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’ Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

The first two servants work hard to invest their master’s money, doubling the original amount. When he returns from his long journey they each appear before him and the conversations between servant and master are identical: “You gave me a certain amount of money to invest, and I have doubled it for you.” “Well done, good and faithful servant.” These servants are judged by their master to be good and faithful – that is, their heart is good, positively disposed toward their master and they desire to do their very best for him. We note that the master’s praise of these two does not depend on the quantity of what they give him, but on the quality of their hearts. Each did all he could for his master with what he had been given.

The third servant, however, is very different from the first two – both in his attitude toward the master and in the effort he was willing to go to on his master’s behalf. When he appears before the master, his words betray the hostility he feels: “You are a harsh man. You harvest crops you didn’t plant and gather crops you didn’t cultivate.” In other words, “You expect me to work hard and let you have the fruit of my labors, and I don’t like that. I’d rather work for myself.”

The master’s response tells us what God thinks about such a person: “You wicked and lazy servant.” This servant is judged by his master to be wicked and lazy – that is, his heart is wicked, desiring only what is best for him and is therefore lazy in doing anything good for his master. Here we have the opposite of goodness and faithfulness. Spiritually speaking, such a person may call himself a Christian, but his lack of care for the things of God, including God’s direction for the use of God’s resources, shows that he is not practicing Jesus’ definition of Christianity.

In the story that follows in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus speaks of the final judgment, which in the parable was represented by the event of the master’s return. On that day the King, that is, Jesus himself, will separate the righteous from the unrighteous, like a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. The righteous are those who gave a cup of water to a thirsty person, who shared their food with one who was hungry, who clothed the naked and welcomed the stranger and visited the sick and the person in prison. The unrighteous are those who decided not do these things. What do both groups have in common? They both have resources and they both have the opportunity to use those resources on behalf of the King. What separates them is whether or not they did so.

God has entrusted us with riches, and as his stewards of those riches we will be held accountable for how we have used them. One day each one of us will stand before him and we will be asked to give an account of our stewardship. What will we hear him say to us? I know what I hope to hear. I hope to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” I know you do too.