

“Staying in the Master’s Graces”

Matthew 25:14-46

As I have lived with this text all week, I have wondered where the Good News is in this parable. It is an uncomfortable parable. It makes us shift in our seats a little bit when we hear it. And it doesn’t give us any easy answers.

The easy sermon for me to share with community today would be the usual: God gives us gifts and we should use those gifts to build up the Kingdom of God. That would have made my life easier if that was all there was to this parable. That would have made all of our lives a little easier if that was all there was to this text.

The problem is that this is not good news anymore. It simply won’t cut it now. That was the good news when everything made sense and we all had extra resources to share. That was the good news when everything was going right and we just needed to give another 10 percent to reach the top. That was the good news when we thought we had control over actually bringing the Kingdom of God here on earth as if God was just waiting for us to get our acts together, and for us to give a little bit more of our time, talents, and resources and then Poof! The Kingdom God would suddenly appear on our terms, on our time, and when it fit best in our schedules to come, and then everything would be okay.

That is no longer the Good News that we can share with a world that is hurting, that is tired of waiting, that is tired of hoping, that is broken. That is no longer the Good News that is credible enough, that is life-giving enough that we can share with a world that wonders why it should be in a relationship with God when the church only cares for itself. The world is waiting and if we are honest with ourselves, we as people of faith are waiting as well. We are wondering how much longer until the Kingdom of God is actually realized fully here on earth, we are wondering how much longer we will have to wait until Jesus comes again, We are wondering when the Master will return.

The simple feel good about ourselves so we can go on about our day and pat ourselves on the back type of news no longer cuts it in our world as life-giving good news nor is it even good news in our own churches. Our frame of reference has changed and because it has been changed, our perceptions about how we view the world, our perceptions about the church, our perceptions even about how we view God have also changed. And we are just trying to figure out how to be faithful in this new reality that we all find ourselves in, this new reality where 1% of the population has all the wealth and 99% carries all the burden; this new reality where the poorest in the United States are still richer than the richest people in some of the poorest nations of the world, this new reality where money making is the name of the game and it is the thing people strive for the most rather than

allowing the money making process to be a way to share resources, resources that will solve the worlds' problems of hunger, disease and poverty. We are in a new reality and our perceptions have changed. We can no longer pat ourselves on the back and turn a blind eye to the injustices of the world. We can no longer brush off the questions of where was our God when it seems like in this new reality God doesn't care about what happens to us or to God's creation any longer. We as disciples of Christ can no longer preach easy sermons that seem to have all the answers because the truth is we don't want to deal with the fact that life is complicated, life is messy, or that sometimes there are just no answers for life in general.

We as people of faith are in a new reality and our perceptions of just exactly how to be the church have changed. Our perceptions of what we are called to do and be as disciples have changed. Our perceptions of who God is for us as a community of faith have changed. In this new reality, all we want to know is how do stay in the Master's good graces and restore some balance to our lives. In this new reality, all we want to know is how to be faithful disciples and live out the Gospel Message in lives. In this new reality, all we want to know is that what we do as servants of God matters.

just like Matthew's community that he was writing to wanted to know. For Matthew's community, everything was up in the air. What used to make sense no

longer works and they were just trying to figure it all out. How they used to view their faith no longer made sense. How they responded to the good news no longer made sense. They thought they knew what it meant to be a disciple but now they were discovering that the easy answers don't hold up anymore. They were just trying to stay faithful in a world where it seemed like the Kingdom of God was a far off place and would never be fully realized here on earth. They were giving up hope. They were tired of waiting and They just wanted to know what it took to stay in the Master's good graces in this new reality that they found themselves living in while staying faithful as God's servants until Jesus returned.

And Matthew's response to these wonderings was why did they think that they are not in the Master's good graces. Just because The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. And just because life was hard didn't mean that they weren't in the Master's good graces anymore. That is the way of the world. Not the way of the Kingdom where the good graces of the Master are shown to all of God's children through love, grace, peace and hope. Matthew challenged them to think again about what exactly their definition of their Master's good graces really was because once they knew the answer to that question, the Kingdom of God and how it work, and how to stay in the good graces of the Master would start to make a lot of sense and free them from their confining perceptions of how things were supposed to work as servants of God. Matthew challenged them to realize

that it all came down to how they viewed how a true servant of God would respond to the Good News. It all came down to what they viewed as the Master's good graces. It all came down to their definition of what it meant to live out this understanding of a servant of God in their lives through their actions and their words. Matthew challenged them to think about what it really meant to be a servant of God, sharing God's love and proclaiming that the Kingdom of God had come near. Just like in our parable today.

In our text, it all comes down to the way we view our relationship with God. It all comes down to what we think it takes to stay in the Master's good graces. It all comes down to how we view the very character of God.

In our story today, We really don't know much about this Master except that before he went on a long journey, he called his three trusted servants together, gave them large amounts of money and then he leaves. That's it. The Master didn't say to the servants to stay in my good graces, I want you to double my money. The Master didn't say to the servants to stay in my good graces, you must achieve something substantial before I return. The Master didn't say to the servants to stay in my good graces, that they had to do anything with the money. The Master just gives each of them according to their ability large amounts of money and then he leaves.

The “what to do now” is left completely up to the individual servants. There are no guidelines, no rules to follow, no laid out consequences that if things are not achieved then they would be in trouble. Each one was given an amount of money according to his ability and each one was given an opportunity to live out what he thought it meant to stay in the Master’s good graces.

And as we read the parable, we understand that each of the servants did exactly just that. They lived out their understanding of what was needed to stay in the Master’s good graces.

The first two servants viewed that to be a good servant that they needed to do something with their resources, to take risks, and to live in faith, not fear. They would have to invest and use the money wisely, They viewed that to be a good servant there needed to be a return on the money, That the money needed to be active somehow. Their understanding of how to stay Master’s good graces meant that there had to be some growth somewhere. So they invested their money. They took the risks. They played the game and the reward was huge. And when the master returned, they showed him the gains. And they entered into a partnership with the Master; a partnership based on trust, a partnership based on growth, a partnership based on joy!

However for the third servant, the only partnership available with the Master was a partnership based on fear because that was the way he view his relationship

with the Master. He thought that to be a good servant meant to keep the money safe, no risks, just worries and fear. His view of being a good servant was to not disappoint the Master when he returned.

The third servant's perception of the Master was that the Master was cruel and harsh and the only way to be in the Master's good graces, to be in relationship with the Master was to be afraid of him, to fear him to the point of immobility , to the point of becoming static and irrelevant.

And when the Master returns, the servant even tries to blame the Master for the lack of growth by saying he was afraid of him, by saying that he was worried that the Master might get upset, by saying that he was a good servant because he lived in fear of the Master when in reality what the servant was really saying was that he didn't do anything with the money because he was only worried about his own needs and his own survival. He was filled with fear and thought only of himself.

But the Master turns it around on this servant by saying if you knew all these supposed things about me and you still didn't act, then tell me why should I be thankful that you are giving back to me what was mine in the first place. If you perceived that I cruel and harsh, then the least you could have done was to make sure that there was something more on my return. If you were really worried that

would disappoint me, then you would have at least tried something, done something.

The Master calls the third servant on his behavior, takes what was given and throws the servant in darkness. This is the frustrating part for us but we must realize that There can be no other way for the partnership to move forward because the servant is trapped in fear. The third servant doesn't want to see the Master in any other way. He cannot see beyond his needs and his own survival. And that as the parable teaches us is not Kingdom behavior. Kingdom behavior takes risks and the one who practices Kingdom behavior knows that the Kingdom of God cannot be experienced fully without the complete giving of ourselves over to the good news. The parable reminds us that Kingdom behavior is not based on one's own survival or needs. The Kingdom of God is about growth and embracing the realization that our God only wants the best for us through a loving relationship, through a partnership based on hope, based on grace, based on joy!

Even the Apostle Paul asks how can one enjoy the wonders of God's Kingdom, the wonders of God's love, the blessing of being named and claimed as God's very own if all one can see or wants to see is a God that one fears, is a God that condemns. God's Kingdom doesn't work that way and our God certainly doesn't work that way either.

Fear is not Kingdom behavior and it is definitely not the type of partnership or relationship that God wants to have with us as God's very own. God wants more for us than to be trapped in fear, worried about our own survival. And that is the good news we are called to share with this world that is hurting and broken. Our God doesn't want a relationship with us based on fear. God wants a relationship with us based on love, a relationship that is giving, caring, and grace filled, a relationship where we know we are claimed and named as God's own not because we fear God or think it is the best way to take care of our needs or ensure our survival. God wants a relationship with us that is based on the principles of the Kingdom of God: justice, mercy, hope, peace and love.

And that is the good news for the world and the good news that we know is true. Because we know our God first loved us not because we gave an extra 10%, not because we earned God's love in any way shape or form, and not because we did anything to deserve God's love. God first loved us because we are claimed and named as God's very own.

And knowing that, frees us to live out the Kingdom of God in our lives, frees us to share the good news, frees us to share our resources, frees us to be a voice for the voiceless. We are loved by our God and we will always be in the Master's good graces forever and ever. And that frees us to be servants of God, claimed, named

and loved always. May we always remember that we are servants of God, forever
in the good graces of our Master. Amen.