

The Slave Who Did Nothing

Matthew 25:14-30

The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, November 19, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There once was a man who lacked confidence.

He did average in school. Even when he got a good teacher, he did average in school. Even when the school offered him help with after school programs and tutors, he only went if the school required him to go and even then he continued to do average in school. He did not think that grades were worth doing. It was no surprise that when he entered high school he dropped out.

He did not look for a job. He was afraid to look for a job. He was a high school drop-out. He feared what other people may think of him. He feared what other people might say to him. In spite of his fears, he never bothered to get his GED. He was afraid to get his GED. He was afraid of what he would have to do in order to earn it. He was afraid of the tests that he would have to pass in order to obtain it.

He continued to live with his parents. His parents wanted him out of the house. They made arrangements for him to work for someone. They found him a job. They found him a place to stay. They had to forcibly move him into his apartment. He was afraid of the rent. He was afraid of the demands of the job that they had found for him. He was afraid of the demands that an employer might make upon him. He did not think that he could live up to expectations like that.

As a result his work was mediocre at best. He did barely enough to fulfill the requirements of his job. His employer wanted to get rid of him the first month he was there, but the employer took sympathy on him and kept him on until he could find the man a new job. Once he found the man a new job and convinced the new employer to take him on, he let the man go to the new job. The man went to the new job with the same fears that he had with the old job. He figured that he would not be able to perform. He was a high school dropout. He suspected that his previous employer had found this new position for him. Even though the new position paid little better money he took no delight in it and it did not motivate him to perform any better in the new position than he did in the old one. His fears overwhelmed him. All he could think about was his failure.

After some time there was an occasion at work that he met a woman. She was not the most attractive woman in the world, but she was someone who gave him some attention. She was kind to him. She tried to help him. She seemed to find excuses to spend time with him.

At first the man did not notice. In fact he would not have noticed at all had someone not pointed out to him that this woman seemed to want to spend time with him. When he mentioned it to the woman she expressed her interest in him. He said nothing because he did not know what to say.

This went on for a year. After a little over a year, the woman grew tired of the fact that the man did not seem to return the interest that she showed in him. He did not push her away. He did not receive her any closer. Even though she liked him and knew that she could love him, he did not seem to return her affection at all.

It became too much for her and she began to talk to him about formalizing their relationship in some fashion. She wanted to date him. She wanted to be his girlfriend. She even hinted that she would be willing to marry him.

No one had ever shown this much interest in him in his life. He was terrified. He was terrified of her expectations. How could he date a woman with his income in jeopardy? How could he marry a woman with his future uncertain? If they did marry, what would she expect from him? What would she

want from him? If they had children, how would he raise them? He did not think that he would be able to raise any children.

When he looked back over his life, he did not think that he had what it took to raise children. He was not financially in the right place. It did not look like he was going to be financially in the right place. And his true terror was what this woman might expect of him as a husband. Her expectations frightened him.

Eventually not having enough nerve to simply tell her no he was rude to her, rude enough that she did not speak to him again. He hurt her, but it kept her away. The man was relieved.

Eventually his employer had to get rid of him. He had done the bare minimum to fulfill the job he had, but nothing more. He showed no ambition or confidence to do more. The employer eventually figured that he was costing him more money than he was making him as an employee and decided to get rid of him. But the employer, like the previous one, felt sorry for him. He knew there was potential there. So he found a new employer for the man before letting him go.

In this new position he met someone who believed in Jesus. Eventually this person told him about Jesus. He told the man about God and about God's judgments. He told the man about God's standards in God's law. He told the man about the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. He told the man that in spite of the fact that he had not lived up to God's standards, that Jesus Christ had taken the punishment from God that he rightly deserved. He told the man that because of Jesus he stood forgiven of all sin and that God had promised him life everlasting. He told the man that God had placed His forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

The man thought about what this Christian had told him. What concerned him the most was that God had standards. God had laws. This concerned him because it explained why he felt that way that he had felt all of his life. Constantly throughout his life he had felt afraid. He was afraid of going to school because the standards of performance that were required of him. He was afraid of both of his jobs because he was afraid of the standard of performance required of him. He was afraid to get married because of what he thought a wife would expect from him. He feared these requirements. When this Christian man spoke to him everything became clear. It became clear that this whole time he had been afraid of God. He had feared God's requirements that presented themselves in the form of school or work or family. He could even think back to when he was a child being afraid of his parents requirements. He was afraid to disappoint them. He did not want to hurt them. So in order to prevent their disappointment he had tried his best to lower their expectations of him. This whole time he realized that he had been dealing with God.

Eventually the Christian man with whom he worked invited him to go to Divine Service. The man refused saying that he did not have a car. The Christian man offered to pick him up and bring him to Divine Service. The man said that he was afraid of crowds and did not like a lot of people. The Christian man said that was not a problem, they would sit in the back and leave before anyone had a chance to greet him. Plus they would go in the side door where there weren't any ushers or greeters to frighten him. The man still refused to go to Divine Service.

He was afraid of what the preacher would say. He was afraid to learn what God's requirements were. In fact the very notion of God filled him with dread. God had created him. God would judge him. God had supreme power and authority over him. Such power terrified him. He could not imagine what it would be like to serve such a God. He wanted to avoid this God at all costs.

The Christian man kept inviting him and he kept giving excuse after excuse as to why he did not wish to go. He never told the Christian man the real reason why he did not wish to go. He simply did not

wish to go. He did not want to face an almighty, omnipotent God. He did not want to face God's requirements. He couldn't even face other people's requirements, much less God's.

Eventually the man died. He got sick and did not want to go to see the doctor for fear the doctor might ask him to do something that he could not do in order to get better.

When he rose from the dead on the day of judgment, the Lord Jesus Christ sat on His glorious throne and put this man on His left hand. The Lord Jesus Christ pointed out to this man all of the things that he had failed to accomplish in his life and the Lord Jesus Christ was consigning him to hell for his failures.

The man protested. I thought a person was not justified by their works! I thought that a person was justified by faith! How can You cast me into hell when a person is not justified by their works? How can you cast me into hell because I did not live up to Your standards? These other people did not live up to Your standards and You are welcoming them into their everlasting reward! So I didn't do as much if I am not justified by my works, what difference does the make?

The Lord Jesus Christ replied, "It is not that you did little. It is that you did nothing. How many times did I have mercy on you even though you had done nothing? I sent you parents. I sent you vocations repeatedly. I sent you a wife. All of these you refused because you were afraid of me. Your fear of me means nothing because if you were truly afraid of Me you would have gotten off of your lazy bottom and done something. But the real offense is that you did not have faith in Me. How dare you stand here on the day of judgment and protest that a person is justified by faith and not by their works. If you had believed that a person was justified by faith and not by their works then you would have known that I am the God of mercy forgiving rebellion and sin because of my atoning death. But you did not believe that. If you had believed that then you would have risked doing something knowing that even if you screwed it up, I would forgive you. You have known that the day you set foot in the Divine Service you would have found a merciful God in the Divine Service. I even sent you my messenger to tell you about Me and you did not believe him. You chose to believe that I was God of impossible power and standards without any mercy or grace at all. Because of your lack of faith, you did nothing. You did nothing with your life, no repentance, and no return on my investment in you."

Then the Lord Jesus Christ commanded for all of everlasting life, "Cast this wicked and worthless slave into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.