**25th Sunday after Pentecost (L33A) – November 15, 2026** Pastor Chris Repp
Matthew 25:14-30 Grace Lutheran Church, Champaign, Illinois

Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Well, here we are again. Another Gospel reading ending in the outer darkness, with weeping and gnashing of teeth. I did warn you. But I hope I also prepared you. Because if you were here last week, and if you happened to be paying attention during the sermon, then you might be able to bring some good news to this text where – once again – there really isn't any. And you might even be able to do that without my help, though I won't put you on the spot. Except maybe inside your own head. So, let's give it a shot. What do you do with that last fellow, the one whose master threw him into the outer darkness, and who called him lazy and wicked? What is the good news for him? Is there any? Or is it only a cautionary tale that you'd better do what's expected of you? What are you thinking? Give me some good news. Quietly, to yourself, remembering that there isn't any good news in this story for that last slave. So, where will you go for it? Well, I hope you'll go to the cross, like I did last week, where Jesus endures the outer darkness, and he does so together with two criminals, who you might even think deserved their fate. No good news for them here though, except perhaps that Jesus is with them. But in Matthew's Gospel there is no conversation with them like in Luke. But I hope you'll go to the cross for good news, and keep Peter close by as you go, as we did last week. Because you know that Peter's story does not end in the outer darkness. You know that Jesus' death and resurrection end up changing Peter's story, in spite of everything he did to deserve a bad outcome. And so maybe it changed the stories of those two criminals. And maybe it also changed the story of the fearful last slave. And maybe, just maybe, it is also changing your story as well. I'm going to say that it is. Because that's what I do. Because that *is* the good news. And this sermon could end right here.

But there's no way I'm ever going to preach a 400-word sermon on a Sunday morning. So let's keep that good news in mind, and go back into the parable knowing that good news is the goal and the outcome, in order to see what else this parable might be teaching us. And we could then do one of two things. The first option is to do what I did in my sermon the last time this text came around, and go with the take of some modern biblical scholars who have pointed out how unlike Jesus the master in today's parable is. We would also take note of how Matthew's original audience would have seen the third slave. They would have considered his refusal to gamble with his master's money as good and honorable. Because in their culture, the whole idea of using money to make more money was very suspect. If we go this route, then the last slave ends up being the hero of the story for his unwillingness to participate in an unjust and exploitative system. He's a hero because he will not compromise his values and is willing to suffer the consequences of his resistance, trusting that God is on his side and will vindicate him in the end. If we read it that way, that would make him a good moral example for us, maybe compelling us to our own resistance against the unjust practices and structures that plague our times. We would expect to be vilified for that choice, but encouraged to remain faithful.

The other way we could go, though, is by seeing the master's desire for a return on his investment as a good thing. Those of us who are actively saving for retirement, or who are now living off the proceeds of our earlier saving and investing, might be encouraged by that kind of message. We're very happy for our collected monies to make even more money so we'll be able to continue to support ourselves and not run out of resources. But as attractive as that might be for some of us, I'm going to suggest that we not think of this option quite so literally, because we

really don't want to promote so-called prosperity gospel thinking, not even in a time of emphasizing stewardship. Think for a moment of another parable, the Prodigal Son from Luke's Gospel, which is really about the responsible older brother. Think back on what his attitude was to the return of his irresponsible younger brother, and the celebration that ensued. And think not just of his attitude toward his brother, but what the whole incident revealed about his relationship to his father. He is outraged that the very best of what they had – the fatted calf – was being wasted on his wasteful and disrespectful brother. All these years, he says to his father, he has been working like a slave for him, and he hasn't gotten any kind of reward. Not even a small feast with his friends. His relationship with his father is exposed as not really that different from his brother's. The focus and motivation have been directed to what he can get from his father for himself. That's what he is working for – himself, and not like a son, but like a slave.

Okay, back to today's parable. Today's story isn't one of a father and his children. It's a story of a master and his slaves. But in this option, it's also about the attitude of the slaves to their master. The money just serves to reveal that. The slaves were all entrusted with huge sums. One talent is 15 years of wages, so even the last slave is given a considerable amount. But we don't know the details of the entrusting part. What did the master say when he handed over the money? Keep it safe? Use it wisely? Get me more money with this money? We don't know what the expectation was. The point is only the huge amount and what might be done with it. So, what would you do if you were one of those slaves? What would you do with that kind of money? Investing involves risk, don't you know, which may includeππ loss of principal. And past performance is no guarantee of future return. So, what do you do? I think it would have been helpful if the second slave, say, had invested his master's money but ended up losing some or all of it. What would have been the master's response then? Thanks for trying? Or would he too end up in the outer darkness? We can't know. But I think we can at least say that the first two slaves had a different attitude toward their master than the third one. They were not so paralyzed by fear of him that they just put the money in a hole in the ground. They felt able to take a risk.

And that's what this second option does for us. Knowing that because of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection for us and for our salvation, the outer darkness will not be the final word for us, we can read this story as being about our God-given talents entrusted to us to use, and to not refrain from using for fear of failure. We can begin to see the talents we have been given not as a test but as an opportunity, so that the only failing is not trusting the good news that we already established back in my first 400 words, not trusting God's love and mercy, not seeing God as our Father but as our slave master and terrifying judge.

But as I repeatedly remind you, that trusting in God is not our work. It is God's work in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for transforming our hearts and aligning our wills and our values with God's whenever God's unfailing promises to us are repeated and remembered, whenever we are assured, as Paul assures the Thessalonians, that we are not destined for wrath but for salvation. So that changes everything. Trusting in God's joy and delight in us for Jesus' sake, trusting that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, we can regard our talents no longer as fearful burdens but as wonderful opportunities. What can you do with yours? Let's see. I'm eager to find out. And so is our loving God and savior.