“Amazing slavery.” Matthew 25:14-30.

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

This is quite frightening, and so comforting at the same time. I am referring to the message of today’s Gospel reading. About the day when our Master summons all of us to give an account on what we have done with lives entrusted to us.

In this parable Jesus is speaking about His servants, more precisely - about His slaves. About us. Are you a good Christian? Have you been good and faithful enough? Have you? Have you done enough for the Lord? Have you used everything He has entrusted to you according to His purposes? Have you?

We may ask these alarming questions from time to time. You may feel that you are less than perfect Christians. You are quite likely right. You may feel that you are not doing enough as Christians, and you probably are right in that as well. Where does it leave us on that day when our Master comes back to settle accounts?

What Jesus teaches with this parable is very helpful. Let’s take a look. There is this Master. And then there are His slaves. Not His employees, not His peers, His slaves. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they had a bad life, not at all. In Jesus time slaves could serve in high positions, accumulate wealth, even have their own slaves. What it does mean is this –

they belong to their Master. Completely. They are fully accountable to Him. Whatever they have, it belongs to Him. Everything. And this is in fact our situation. As Jesus puts it in the parable about the Rich Fool: "**This night your soul [will be] required of you**." [Luke 12:20]

Now, the Master sets out for a journey and entrusts to His servants to take care of His possessions. He entrusts a lot. One talent is roughly equal to 20 years' salary. He also is very considerate, as He entrusts to each one of His slaves according to their abilities.

What happens next? The first two slaves, they at once go and trade with those talents, they put them to good use. But the third one… does nothing. Nothing! He hides what is entrusted to him. Then after a long time the Master comes back and begins to settle accounts with His slaves.

The first one comes: "**Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."** The same with the second slave.

Then comes the third. He is his Master's slave. His Master had trusted him. He had entrusted him His possessions according to his abilities. And this slave had done nothing. And now he begins with criticizing his Master and justifying his inaction:

"**Master, I knew you to be a hard man […] so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."** Everything in this parable, and everything that we know about this Master indicates that those were lame excuses made by someone who either didn't know his Master or had chosen to ignore his own status – the Master's slave, and to neglect his own responsibilities.

Who is the Master in this parable? Our Lord Jesus, our God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we know what kind of Master He is. "**A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness**." [Ex 34:6]

We know what He has done for us. "I am laying down my life for you, so that you can live." We know what He has prepared for us. Life eternal in New Heavens and New Earth, where we will see Him face to face and will reign with Him forever in divine joy and blessedness. "**Enter into the joy of your master!"**

And we know what it means to be slaves of this Master. He has, indeed, purchased us, He has purchased you paying the ultimate price, His life. As Peter puts it: "[He ransomed us], **not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ."** [1 Pet 1:18-19] Why did He do this? So that you "**may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness**."

Now what has this Master entrusted to us? What is so incredibly precious? In a more general way we can reply together with Paul the apostle: "**What do you have that you did not receive.**" [1 Cor 4:7] What do we have that we shouldn't use for the sake of our Master? You belong to Jesus.

The time He has given to you, too. All your talents, skills, knowledge, abilities, assets, opportunities, all of that are His, entrusted to us, so that we at once would go and put them to good use for the sake of our Master.

Now, ask these questions. “How can I be as faithful as possible with everything that I am and everything that I have to serve my Lord according to His instructions and to advance His purposes in my congregation, in my family, in my workplace, in my community?

How can my Master Jesus use me to bless all those lovely and not so lovely people He has placed in my life?” As we ask these questions, we can see endless joyful and meaningful opportunities to put those talents to good use. Don’t we dare to hide them!

But that is not all that is meant by those talents. The earliest Christian interpretations understood the talents as the mysteries of the Kingdom of God [Mat 13] that have been revealed and entrusted to us. The Great News, the truth that the Triune God has revealed to us, the life-giving message that changes everything.

“I am your Creator. I formed you in your mother’s womb. All the days of your life are written in my book. And I am your Redeemer. I chose you before you even knew I existed. I laid down my own life so that you can be free and have life abundant.

I called you out of the jaws of death into fellowship with me. I did all of this when you were still hostile to me and rejected me. I did this because I love you and want to have you with me. I want to bless you beyond anything you can imagine.”

When the Holy Spirit of God assures us that this is true, that this is what God’s attitude towards you is, it changes everything, it changes us. We can’t help but at once go and use those talents. Not driven by fear of our Master, but because our hearts are melting from the experience of His overwhelming grace.

Then we put those talents to work in **two ways. First**, God’s grace, forgiveness and acceptance changes our hearts. As we recognize how much we have been forgiven our hearts are made warm and living, pulsing with desire to bless others with forgiveness as we have been forgiven.

We want our forgiveness to change the lives of those who may have sinned against us, even as it costs us, just as it cost our Master Jesus. And as God’s grace penetrates our souls, it also drives us to mend those relationships which are broken.

Jesus’ love and forgiveness enables us to admit where we have been wrong and to ask for forgiveness where we have sinned and hurt others. This is one way we put those talents of God’s grace to good use. Don’t we dare *not* do this; don’t we dare to hide these talents!

The second way we put these God’s talents to work is this. When the Spirit reveals the Father’s heart to us, we are in awe and wonder in face of the goodness and beauty of our God, our gratitude bursts forth and we want to share this joy with everyone, we want them to meet this Master, this Jesus, this God whom we are allowed to call our Father. We want to multiply our joy by revealing this mystery to everyone.

So, we try to learn more about this Triune of God, we pray and look for opportunities to put those talents to work, we try to articulate the Good News in our words, we discuss it with fellow saints, we consult with our pastors, and joy overflows. May the Lord help us that we never hide these talents but put them to good use!

The five talents earned five more. The two earned two more. It is true, the Word of God never returns without accomplishing His purpose. But sometimes we have this somewhat limited understanding that God's purposes for His Word are to do only with those to whom we will speak that Word. That is only partly true.

But even before you speak that Word to others, the Word of God already accomplishes His purposes… with you. You read it, you listen to it, you try to understand it better, you try to articulate the Good News so you can share it with others.

You discuss it with fellow saints, and while you do that, the Word accomplishes its purpose, it changes you, strengthens your faith, builds you up in wisdom and understanding, comforts you, fills you with gratitude, hope and divine joy. The Word never returns empty!

This is important. The point of the parable is not about how much you have done. It is about whether you know your gracious Master and whether you know who you are, that you belong to Him, dearly loved and destined for eternal greatness.

But those who forget who our Master is and criticise Him, those who forget who we are, those who hide those talents, and especially the gift of forgiveness and the Words of Life entrusted to us, whatever lame excuses they make, they will hear those words: "**You wicked and slothful servant! […] Cast this worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

But what about us? What about those who know our gracious Master, who have tried… but certainly not our best. Who wanted to do good but failed. What about us, when our weakness and cowardice have made us less than perfect servants of Christ? A fellow pastor suggested that this is how our conversations may go when our Master Jesus comes to settle accounts with us [Dr J Gibbs, CC on Matthew].

"One of us approaches the Master and says, "Lord, you entrusted these things to me, and I have gained this much. … But there was so much more that I could have done!" The Master replies, "Yes, I am well aware that there was more that you could have done… Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Master."

Another approaches the Master and says, "Lord, you entrusted this to me, and I have gained an additional amount. … But I was timid too often. I failed to take advantage of all the opportunities presented to me." The Master replies, "Yes, I recall every detail of all the times when you were a coward… Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter the joy of your Master."

The same verdict, the same divine joy awaits every Christian, not just those who served productively or faithfully enough, whatever that might mean. And at the End it matters only that Christ is your Master who has purchased you.

He entrusted to you talents that you were able to work with for His glory. If you keep your eyes on the Master, then you will remember who you are, you will live that way and you *will* enter His joy." Amen.