

St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Modesto, California
The Second Sunday in End Time
The Last Judgment
November 7, 2004

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

GOSPEL OF THE DAY: Luke 19:11-27

¹¹ While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. ¹² He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. ¹³ So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

¹⁴ "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

¹⁵ "He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

¹⁶ "The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

¹⁷ "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

¹⁸ "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

¹⁹ "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

²⁰ "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. ²¹ I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

²² "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

²⁴ "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

²⁵ "'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

²⁶ "He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.

²⁷ But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.' NIV

Until He Comes Back...

Dear brothers and sisters of our Lord,

I can remember times growing up, as I was middle-school or high-school age, that one of my parents would leave me alone at home for awhile. Often, before they left, they

would give me a job to do. “Wash the dishes before I come back.” One of the first things I’d wonder—and sometimes I’d ask them before they left—was, “When are you going to get back?” If they’d tell me, my mind would instantly begin making computations: “They’ll be back in two hours. It will take me about twenty minutes to wash the dishes. That means before I wash the dishes I can sit on the couch and watch TV for, let’s see, one hour and forty minutes!”

Any of you ever make similar calculations?

Jesus tells us, “I’m coming back. Not like the first time, as a cuddly baby. This time everyone will know it. A deafening roar, a blinding flash, people cowering in fear—I’m coming as King of kings and Lord of all lords.” One of our first reactions to this is, “Jesus, um, could you tell us exactly when you’re going to come back? We’d kinda like to know so we can plan what we’re going to do until you get here.” And, sinners that we are, our motives are not always pure. “Do we have any time to do what we want before the Last Day arrives? When do we have to get serious, get down to business? How much time is there to do what we want before we have to start thinking about what God wants?”

But have you noticed that he doesn’t tell us when? Jesus doesn’t say, “I’ll be back in two hours/two years/ two millennia.” He doesn’t tell us when.

Therefore, there’s a more important question for us to ask. Since Jesus evidently is not going to tell us when—much to our disappointment, perhaps—this question, the one we would rather be secondary, becomes the primary one: “Jesus, what do you want us to do in the meantime?”

What does Jesus want us to do until he comes back? Let’s find out from this parable Jesus tells in Luke 19.

...be aware that his reign is unstoppable

The main plotline of this parable comes through clearly. A man is going away to have a kingship conferred on him. Things like this took place in the ancient world. One such case, in fact, was probably known to the people to whom Jesus is speaking. When the man comes back, he will be king. Before he goes, though, he speaks to his servants. He entrusts them with some money and tells them to use it wisely...

We’ll come back to this part of the parable in a minute. Before we discuss it, however, I’d like to think about the subplot in the story. After the man leaves to be appointed king, some of the citizens lodge a complaint against him. But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' He was made king, however, and returned home.

Jesus’ point would have been evident to those who were listening to him. There were people who felt the way the citizens in the parable felt. The notion that this Jesus from Nazareth was going to somehow be their king? Thanks, but no thanks.

Nevertheless, the man in the parable becomes king in spite of people’s protests. In the end, what did the people’s rejecting their king accomplish? What came of it? The man became their king anyway. All their rejection did was seal their doom.

Do things ever happen even though you don’t think they will? Are there certain things that you can disbelieve, but they’ll happen anyway? I’ve heard people say things to the effect of “I’m not worried about going to hell; I don’t believe in hell.” To which I think, “Huh? Does it really work that way? Can I just choose not to believe something is real, and it’s not? For example, if I choose not to believe in cancer, does that mean I’ll

never get it? If I choose to believe that there we are completely safe from another terrorist attack on American soil—if I simply reject the idea that it'll ever happen—does that mean it won't?" Now, if we were on a university campus right now, we could have a discussion about philosophy and epistemology—how we know what's real and what's not. But let's just keep it simple. I ask again, "Are there certain things that you can disbelieve, but they'll happen anyway?"

My point is this: even if we don't believe that there will be any such thing as Judgment Day, does that mean there won't be? Or could it happen that it will happen whether we believe it will or not?

Those who tell Jesus, "I don't want you as my king," will find themselves bowing the knee to him whether they like it or not. And they will find that all the times they shrugged Jesus off or denounced his existence or rejected him—all these things did was seal their doom. "And these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me."

Jesus is fairly blunt here, wouldn't you say? His warning: "Be aware that my reign is unstoppable. You may not want me as your king, you may think I'm never coming back to this earth, but I will come back. I will reign. It may not look like it now, but a day of final judgment is real, and it's coming. Prepare."

...be faithful with what he gives you

Back to the other part of the parable. The man leaves to be appointed king. Before he goes, he gives some money to his servants. He calls ten of his servants and gives them each one mina (this is a substantial sum of money, maybe in the \$20,000 range by today's standards?). And he also gives them a command: "Put this money to work," he said, "until I come back." When he says, "Put this money to work," he's telling them to do business with it—invest it, maybe.

Then he comes back from his journey, and he summons his servants to find out if they listened to him. Did they use what he had given them? Did they do with it what he wanted them to do with it? Did they make a profit?

"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

"The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

"His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

The king was pleased. These servants did what he told them to do. They were faithful with what he had given them. They used what he had given them for his purposes.

But there was one servant who didn't. In spite of the fact that the man had told him what to do, this servant hadn't. "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.' The servant had been afraid of the master, so he had socked the money away. That was not, however, what the king had told him to do with it.

"His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?' If the servant knew that his master was a nonsense guy, then why hadn't he done what his master said?

The king's judgment is swift. "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

The king hears some objections to this. "Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

"He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.'

Do you get the message that Jesus is sending? He is coming back. He is coming in glory at the end of time. He tells people as he speaks this parable that this glorious coming won't happen immediately, but that it will happen nevertheless. In the meantime, Jesus wants us to use what he has given us wisely. He calls us to be faithful, meaning that he has entrusted us with things that he wants us to manage wisely. He wants us to use what he has given for his purposes.

What has Jesus given to us? Short answer: everything we have, right? What do we have that God did not give us? Ultimately, everything we have comes from him. Our bodies and lives, our time, our skills, our abilities, our families and friends, and, as this parable reminds us, our money and material blessings.

What does Jesus want us to be doing until he comes back? Using what he gives us, and using it faithfully. That means remembering that what we have is a trust from him. We are not the ultimate owners of anything; he is. Our time, our skills, our abilities, our very bodies—how can we use them in a way that honors God and shows respect for him and his words?

We talked about this a few weeks ago, as you may (or may not!) remember. In his parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus said, "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." (Luke 16:9) Use God's money for God's purposes, one of which is spreading the message about Jesus. That's an investment that pays eternal dividends. Be faithful with what God gives you.

But before we leave it at that, there's something we don't want to overlook. It's maybe so obvious that we do. Let me put it this way: if you had been standing there listening to Jesus on the day he first spoke this parable, what would have been the thing that Jesus wanted you to use faithfully till he came back in glory? What was the one thing those people had that was more valuable than money, than family, than their skills, than anything?

Wasn't it Jesus himself?

Those people had contact with Jesus. And what Jesus wanted them to do more than anything was not to squander that contact. These people encountered the King of kings and Lord of lords. He wanted them to acknowledge his kingship and to trust that he would bring them peace. Not peace by conquering the Romans who occupied their land. Not peace by making everything happy and fun in their lives. Peace with God was what he brought. Who else could actually make them holy in God's sight? Who could die for them and with one death erase from their records all the punishment they had coming from God? Who else could assure them that they would not be conquered by death, and then back up what he said by actually dying and coming back to life? Jesus wanted these people to appreciate the treasure they had in him and to trust in him, acknowledging him as their Lord and their Savior.

Doesn't Jesus want the same for us? We have contact with him, too. Sure, we don't get to actually see him face to face. But we do encounter Jesus when we hear about him

from his Bible. What will we do with him? “Believe in me,” he says. “See that I and what I give are more valuable than anything.”

And here’s something else that’s priceless about Jesus: in him we find pardon for the times we’ve failed to be faithful. For all the times I have not used what God has given me in the way he’s wanted me to use it—I come to Jesus with these sins, and they’re gone, forgiven. For all the times I’ve forgotten that all I have comes from him—I bring these sins to Jesus, and they’re gone. He takes all my unfaithfulness onto his shoulders and bears it all away. And in exchange he lets me count his perfect life as my own. Who else can do that? Only Jesus.

We don’t know when. We don’t know when the day of final judgment will be. We don’t know when we’ll die—that day could come first, and for us that would then be the day we stand face to face with our God.

We don’t know when, but we do know what. What God wants in the meantime, that is. He wants us to be aware that he is in charge in this world and that it will come to an end when he decides. He wants us to live every day with the recognition that it could be the day of his appearing. And we know that until he comes, God wants us to be faithful with what he gives us. See the treasure we have in Jesus, in the contact with him we have in his Sacraments, in his Word. Treasure him. Share him. Be faithful till he comes, and look up with a smile to welcome him when he does, for he is the one who gives you all. Amen.