

"Then He Went Away"

Matthew 25:14-30

November 13, 2005

I saw a sign recently in which a business was posting new Office hours – I liked it. The sign said:

OFFICE HOURS

Open most days about 9 [or 10]

{occasionally as early as 7 but some days as late as 12 or 1}

We Close about 5:30 {or 6}.

{occasionally around 4 or 5 but sometimes as late as 11 or 12}

Some Days or Afternoons we aren't here at all [but lately I've been here just about all the time except when I'm somewhere else]

Jesus tells a parable. The setting of the parable is interesting - a man - obviously a rich man, prepares to go on a journey and the one bit of preparation that he makes is to entrust his money into the keeping of His 'slaves' [servants]. Why a wealthy man would do such a thing is really hard for us to figure out - but that is the story. And it is not small change that He gives them. Even though it is a bit hard to figure out exactly how much money this was since a "Talent" was a measure of weight [about 75 pounds] not an exact dollar figure, we believe that a single talent was roughly equivalent to 15 - 18 years wages for the average worker - so 5 talents was probably more than an average person would normally hope to earn in a lifetime of working [unless he was planning to be a wage earner for more than 75 years]. He just 'entrusted' it to the slaves. And then the text simply says, "Then he went away!" Imagine it. A life time of earnings just dropped in your lap and 'then he went away.' No instructions - no timetable - the giver is just away. It would not be too hard to imagine the slaves looking at each other and saying, "When the cats away - the mice will play!" And let the party begin.

Who needs office hours - we will be hard at it almost all of the time [except when we are somewhere else]. Life is goooooood!!!

There are many people that believe that God has simply gone away. One ancient belief was that all of creation is like a giant clock. Yes, there was a god who created it all. But once he was done creating, god simply wound up the great universe clock - got everything spinning just right - stepped back to check out the project and decided it was

pretty good stuff - and then just went away and on to another project somewhere. And when the great clock winds down - it is over.

It is an interesting belief - of course the church decided that it was heresy - it is not what we believe. True enough, we believe that God created it all - set everything in motion - but rather than going away and leaving us to our own devices, God chose to come to us and walk with us in the person of Jesus the Christ. God does not simply leave us and go away but is constantly present to us as we are filled with His Holy Spirit. – Well, that, at least is what the church teaches.

But what do you believe? I know that there are many who look around at the state of the world and hang their heads as they see the darkness that is experienced in so many different ways. I know folks who believe that it is impossible to accept that God could be present or in control with these kinds of things going on. If God has 'left the building' what would be the point of seeking to have a relationship with God? What do you believe?

There are many things that would seem to indicate that many believe that God and our faith in Jesus Christ is not important. I read an article this week that talked about the fact that America no longer leads the pack in numbers of Christians. The article said that:

"Of the 2 billion Christians in the world today, 560 million are in Europe and 260 million are in America. In comparison, there are 480 million Christians in Latin America and 313 million in Asia and 360 million in Africa. Non-Western Christians are already in the majority, their lead is substantially bigger when you consider not just nominal but active or "practicing" Christians, and demographic trends make it likely that the gap will become even greater in the future."

What is it that you believe? Today as we receive new members, do we really believe that God is still in the picture enough to give ourselves to be a part of God's family? Today as we talk about a response to God through the stewardship skit shared earlier and the "Thank Offering" that our Women's organization will receive, do we truly believe that God has entrusted a lifetime of income and a world of resources to us but has not simply left us for good and instead comes to us to receive what is His with interest so that His mission can be carried on?

The parables in the closing part of Matthew's gospel are really interesting. Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven and a God who is present to us - a God who comes to celebrate and touch base with those to whom He has trusted His treasures. There are so many interesting points that we might consider as we think about these parables but because of time I will only note two things specifically. First - all of the slaves received some "talents" - one might easily suggest that it was not fair that one slave received so much more than another. I know how easy it is to say, 'I just don't have the 'talents' that so-in-so has - I have nothing to offer' - but Jesus did not look at it that way. All had received -

all had something to invest in the mission. Certainly there was no expectation that the slave with one talent would bring a return of five more talents in the way the first slave did. But the expectation was that you don't hide the talent you have in the back yard.

The second thing I noted was that even though the slave who had received 5 talents and gained 5 more for the master returned them to Him - at the end of the parable the slave still has ten. Could it be that what we return to our God is never really lost to us? We ought to ponder that some time. What the parable tells us clearly is that the first 2 slaves who return with interest on the masters gifts that had been entrusted to them were invited into the joy of the master.

Is God present in your world? Has God entrusted you with great gifts / talents. Enter into the joy of the master.

AMEN