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### Sermon for Sunday, November 13, 2011

Sermon Texts: Deuteronomy 4: 25-31  
Psalm 123  
Matthew 25: 14-30  
I Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Sermon Title: "What If?"  
Sermon Topic: Stewardship

Sermon Purpose: To teach the meaning of the parable in today's world and from today's perspective, regarding our lives, our life as a church, etc.

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Sermon Prayer: Eternal God, Who gives us breath to praise You, eyes to behold Your mercy, and words to proclaim Your abiding love; breathe upon us Your promised Holy Spirit; that our minds may be opened to Your wisdom and our tongues boldly declare Your sovereignty; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

As pastor of The Linden Presbyterian Church, my family and I have lived in the church-owned Manse for over thirty years. During that time, I have seen one of those neighbors outside his home on only **three** occasions. For the past thirty years, except for three times to my knowledge, he has been sequestered in his home: not seeing or speaking to **anyone** except by telephone, or maybe computer.

For thirty years, he has not enjoyed his beautiful surroundings, shared in any conversation, nor participated in any event, that has occurred. He has neglected to invest his knowledge, his history, or his time in the place God has given him or in the lives of the people around him. I often wonder what his excuse will be when God asks what he has done to affect the lives of others.

Our currency is a mystery! I'm not talking about our current national financial situation. I'm not even talking about the mysteries surrounding the stock market. I mean it's a mystery to me how a dime is **smaller** than a nickel, but is worth **twice** as much. It's smaller than a **penny**, yet a dime is worth **ten times** that of the penny.

A talent, in biblical times, was a coin about the size of a dime. How much is a talent worth? According to the Scriptures, it's equivalent to **fifteen** year's of a laborer's wages. So, if we're talking in terms of money, alone, that means that these three laborers in this morning's Gospel Lesson were given a pretty good "head start" on making a **fortune**. The text doesn't give any particular **reason** why each of the servants was chosen or why each received his particular-sized share. But, suffice it to say that the Master found them at **least trustworthy**.

The one who received the five talents would have to live seventy-five years to make that much money. So, to have been given this much - all at once - would mean he and his family could have lived quite well for quite a while, had he decided just to take it and use it for himself. But, he knew his Master's trust and faith in him to keep his word. And, evidently, he had become a person whose word was his bond. So, he took the money, invested it, and **doubled it!** End result: one hundred fifty years' worth of salary.

Let's say a general laborer in today's economy makes \$30,000 a year. If he happened to be the



first laborer in today's lesson, he would have been given **two and one quarter million dollars** (\$2,250,000). After his investment, he would be returning **four and one-half million dollars** (\$4,500,000) to his master.

The second man only received **two** talents. But, still that was equal to **thirty** years of wages, or **nine hundred thousand dollars** (\$900,000). Maybe this man was **older** than the first, and if any misfortune happened, the Master knew the man would only be able to work another thirty years to pay it off. I **doubt** that's the case because the Master would have chosen someone else – someone younger to care for his property. Still, this man invested wisely and he, also, doubled what he had been given. So, he was able to turn over **one million eight hundred thousand dollars** (\$1,800,000).

The third man may have been considered trustworthy by his Master, but something happened when he was given the single talent. Here he had in his hands **fifteen** years' wages (**four hundred fifty thousand dollars** - \$450,000) - all at once. Wow! You may not be able to imagine two and a quarter million dollars, but can you imagine how much money you would have if you were suddenly handed \$450,000? And, can you picture how **frightening** it would be to be **responsible** for all that money, especially when you knew the owner of that money would want to see at **least** that much when he returned?

Well, that's the fear that **paralyzed** this servant! He knew his Master to be a hard man. Maybe he didn't trust himself to invest wisely because he had never had anything **to** invest. He **buried** the money in a hole in the ground, and waited. He probably kept a watch over it to make sure no one else **found** the site and dug it up. He probably **guarded** it well. But, he didn't **use** it as the Master had **intended**.

That's the **point** of the matter: He didn't use it as the Master had intended!

How often are we in the same predicament? How often do we find ourselves - or are we **found** - to be lazy with our gifts? I'm not talking only about our financial concerns. I'm talking about all of life, itself.

Our finances **may** be that we just don't have the money to invest, right now. At today's rates, the banks aren't offering much interest on savings accounts or cd's. But maybe we can cash in some gold jewelry and use **that** money to purchase an annuity and save a little something for our future, or for the future of our children.

What about our church building, here? Is **that** being used as the Master intended? How **did** the Master intend for it to be used? Yes, we use it for worship and for our meetings and the Mission Project. It has become somewhat of a community center with the outside organizations that meet here: A.A., Ministerio, Comunidad, the numerous Girl Scout troops, A.A.R.P., etc. But, does all this reflect the faith of the people who built the building? Does all this carry God's message of hope and love and reconciliation? We **do** that through our Mission Project, through the collection of "pop tops" and plastic bottle caps to help purchase wheelchairs and chemotherapy treatments. But, how **else** could we (**should** we) be doing it?

What would we do if Christ returned and said to us, "It's not enough! You should have done more. I'm going to take from you what you have and give it to those who have proven themselves to be **more** worthy and **more** faithful with what they have been entrusted."? What would happen then?

The same can be said for the way we share our faith. I know I'm "preaching to the choir," here. But, listen to me, for a minute. What happens when the only faith in God we have is what we learned in our first couple years of Sunday Church School? How mature is that faith? Yes, it's a beginning. It's a simple, uncomplicated faith, but where does it **go**? How does it **grow**?

Our faith can only grow and be useful (to ourselves and to others) if we meet together, regularly, and **share** our faith; share our **experiences** of God's work in our lives, God's hand moving **through** our community; God's **Spirit** healing, guiding, calming us down, stirring us up, and prodding us onward. We need to share that information with one another, here, this morning, and with others outside these walls. We need to bring others to a closer relationship with God, through our relationships with Jesus Christ - and each of our relationships is **so** different.



What about our own lives? Have we used **them** as God has intended? Maybe. And then, again, maybe **not**. What would you do if the doctors told you that you had only **one more year** to live? How would you live that last year of life? Would you do everything you never had the **guts** to do in the past? Or would you become paralyzed by the fear of death and spend that time sitting at home, wringing your hands, and crying about what you'll be missing?

Would you try to do everything you could to make your life count for something? Would you invest that year of life in the life of someone **else**, and thereby make that life gather interest and grow?

Let's bring Jesus' parable home and use it in our lives, today, and in the life and ministry of this congregation. Let's make LPC a lighthouse of both faith sharing and faithful caring; by making the corner of Princeton Road and Orchard Terrace a haven for **all** souls who want to know more about Jesus Christ and what He has done for the **world!**

Let us pray:

God of Creation and Master of our lives, you have given us so much in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Guide us as we consider our responsibilities **to** that gift, and the ways in which we must **share** that gift in our lives together. As we celebrate, as we meet, as we discuss our future, as we worship together, as we reach out in mission and in service, empower us with your love and with your guidance, we pray, in **Jesus'** name. Amen.

