**Mysterious Talents 2017 11 19**

**Matthew 25:14-30 Pr. H. Adachi**

May the Lord’s grace and peace be poured into the hearts of the people gathered in this sanctuary!

Have you ever heard about the German Sociologist named Max Weber? He wrote a book called “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” in the early 20th century. When I was in my late 20s, I was very interested in him and read many books about Max Weber, as well as books on this idea.

If I simplify the point of the book, Protestantism is not a refutation to earning money. In those books, they were explaining that aspects of Protestantism contributed to Capitalism although I do not think that is true in Martin Luther’s teaching, which I will further discuss in the latter part of this message.

I would like to jump into the words of the Gospel text. What did you think about the story, after you heard it? In the story, we heard the word “talent” so many times. I think we heard it 17 times. What is talent? According to a study bible, it was the highest unit of currency at that time, and the value of one (1) talent was six thousand (6000) days of labor.

If we think about one talent in today’s value, it would be over a million dollars. It is worth a lot. To make it simple they were something like 5 million dollars, 2 million dollars and one million dollars were entrusted to each. Based on such an understanding of the word “talent”, and if we literally interpret the Gospel text, one interpretation of the Gospel could be something like the following:

God gives us a capital fund according to each person’s capability. Then each individual is expected to earn money diligently utilizing God’s capital. Then, the earned money should be offered to God. If you are engaged in business, it might be encouraging, expect maybe the last part that all earned money should be returned to God.

This interpretation might make people think that Capitalism is in God’s heart. That is why earning money is a good thing. If you earn more money, then even though all the earned money is offered to God, that money is returned to you, based on the Gospel text. Also, if there are people who did not invest money, that money also comes to those who are successful in business. Therefore, it is not unusual that people who have more money seemingly earn more and more money and that is the capitalism which is God’s will according to the literal interpretation of scripture.

However, is this really God’s will? In the 16th century and after, in western Europe, due to Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible from Latin or Greek to German, other translations in other languages were eventually available. As a result, it became easier for people to read the Bible. Therefore, the interpretation that I discussed might have become popular and we cannot deny Max Weber’s analysis that the Protestant Church was a motivator for Capitalism to become very popular and change the world.

But the Bible was being read before the Reformation by the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Church leaders. I do not think that the interpretation of the text today was like the literal one that I discussed.

I believe there is a deeper meaning than just describing the highest currency unit. Of course, in today’s world, when we use the word “talent”, it means the capabilities and gifts that God gives us. However, when we think about the time when Matthew wrote the text almost 2000 years ago, I wanted to search more about this Greek word, “talenton.”

I found an article that says one taleneon in Israel was something like 200 pounds of gold. It is something beyond my imagination how precious it was in terms of value at that time. I believe Jesus was talking about the tremendous value of God’s gift. What is the most valuable matter we can learn from the Bible?

Jews were interested in the law, of course, and one of the questions they asked Jesus was what is the most important and precious law. And the answer was to love God and to love your neighbors. Then after he taught this, several days later he was crucified because of humanity’s sin. But on the third day, he was raised and then he forgave all our sins.

Through the Bible, we learn that the most important and precious matter is how God unconditionally loves human beings. The love of Jesus Christ is so priceless and beyond our imagination even today, in the 21st century.

Here we may think that the word talent which we heard, 17 times, in the short paragraph represents the priceless love that God freely gives us. Before many Protestant churches were born, I do not think that the Greek word “talenton” was understood as a capital fund, but instead it was the steadfast love, mercy, and grace of God.

Since this is a Lutheran congregation and historically the “Lutheran Church” is an icon of the first Protestant church, you might be interested in what Martin Luther thought about capitalism. Based on what I learned at Luther Seminary and conversations with professors and other students, I believe Martin Luther was against it, however, it does not mean that he was a communist because both words, capitalism and communism, were not common (or even invented) during Martin Luther’s lifetime.

The point I want to make is that Martin Luther’s idea is sometimes expressed as “Happy Exchange” which means without offering anything to God, we receive God’s precious grace and love freely. We do not have to earn or invest in it. We just receive it and are to respond to God’s Grace and Mercy by sharing His unconditional love with others. And that is the heart of Luther’s protest.

Today, again, through the Gospel and Holy Communion, we are invited to receive amazing grace and steadfast love from God, Jesus Christ. And we wear God’s mercy and share God’s grace in the world. We have the mission to make the world different and new everyday by filling it with Jesus’ steadfast love. Amen.