

Dear Servants of the Lord Jesus,

In the book of Acts in the Bible it tells part of the story of the New Testament church. We hear of ministry challenges and the growth of Jesus' church. In the narrative there is a young man by the name of John Mark. He and his mother were a part of the original disciples in Jerusalem. John Mark apparently had ambitions to serve as a pastor. He is taken along on St. Paul's First Missionary Journey. Early on in that journey, John Mark got what we call "cold feet." He deserted the missionary party and returned home. Later on St. Paul was so upset about the desertion that he would not take John Mark on his 2nd Missionary Journey. (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5,13)

Today we hear Jesus calling us to faithful service. He is going to warn us against unfaithfulness. This might make us nervous. I don't want to be unfaithful to my Savior, but I am human.

Jesus' words, though they contain a warning, are very encouraging. We remember who is speaking. This is Jesus who has forgiven our sins. This is Jesus who loves us. Jesus fills us not with dread, but thankfulness. And we will see today that **Thankfulness Leads to Faithfulness**.

Let's look at the parable or story that Jesus uses to teach us and we will come back to John Mark later.

1. You've been given Gifts. Vs. 14-15

Jesus want us to know that he gives gifts to you and me his servants.
A. In the parable the master gives gifts to his servants before he leaves. Jesus is the master portrayed in the parable and we are the servants.

1. The master leaving in the parable is Jesus going to his death and resurrection and eventually his Ascension into heaven. Jesus before he leaves gives gifts to his servants. They are to use them until he returns when there will be a reporting of what was done with his gifts.

2. None of this would be possible if Jesus had not given us the gift of salvation. St. Paul writes about this gift in Galatians 2:20 (NIV84), **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** Jesus gave himself to sufferings and death so that we might have forgiveness and life with God. Jesus has also given us a

heart that loves him and wants to serve him.

B. Jesus wants us to serve and he even gives gifts to help us serve. What are these gifts?

1. St. Paul mentions spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 (NIV84):

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit (1)the message of wisdom, to another (2)the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another (3)faith by the same Spirit, to another (4)gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another (5)miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another (6)distinguishing between spirits, to another (7)speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another (8)the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Besides spiritual gifts there also mental and physical gifts that can be used to serve Jesus. Some people count numbers, others enjoy physical labor, etc. In summary there are many different gifts and they are all useful.

2. Jesus makes an important distinction. Not all people receive the same amount of gifts. One servant received 5 bags of gold, another 2 and another 1. The Lord in his wisdom knows what each person needs for their work.

2. Make faithful use of your gifts. Vs. 16-19, 22, 24-25

Jesus wants us to work. In another parable in Matthew 24 Jesus says, **“It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”** (46 NIV 1984) As he tells the parable that Jesus also calls for a faithful use of gifts while he is gone.

A. We have a fine example of faithfulness in two of the servants. The servants with 5 bags and 2 bags immediately went to work. When the master returns they eagerly show what they have accomplished. They have been faithful.

B. Jesus also gives us an example of unfaithfulness. The servant with the one bag of gold was lazy and so he does the easiest work. He dug a hole and hid it in the ground. That way he didn't have to deal with it and he could spend his time and efforts on himself.

His words state that he believed the master was a hard man. That is a lie.

If he actually believed it, he would have been afraid and done something, perhaps given the bag of gold to bankers so that it would earn interest. This wicked servant actually believed the master was not ever coming back and so he didn't see any reason to be faithful or loyal.

C. Please understand that this man is not a typical unbeliever out in the world. This unbeliever represents a person who was a child of God. Their faith grew cold. They got bored with worship services and Holy Communion. They might still show up for appearances sake. However, inside they don't love Jesus and they don't think he is coming back. There is no desire to serve Jesus except for appearances sake.

If we ever end up being like the wicked servant, where we don't care about Jesus, our Savior, we need to repent. He is coming back. He will judge very harshly those who received his grace, but then turned cold and walked away. As St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:2, **“Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.”**

I want to acknowledge that not all of us here have struggled with being cold towards Jesus. But we may be guilty at times of simply unfaithfully using our gifts. I'm needed to serve on the church Council and I just don't want to. I can sing, but I don't feel like working out my voice in choir. I could serve coffee and cookies, but I don't like people criticizing how I do it, so I simply refuse to help.

Dear servants of Jesus, if you are breathing and moving, Jesus expects you to use your talents to the limits that you are able. We should not be ashamed of something we can't do. For all the excuses and unfaithfulness, we need to say, *“Jesus I'm sorry.”* Rest assured that you are forgiven. As St. John says in 1 John, **“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”** (1:7) Assured of forgiveness we will want work at being faithful as we go forward.

3. You've been inspired to use your gifts. Vs. 19-23, 26-30

If we need a little extra inspiration, Jesus gives it in the parable.

A. We are inspired by the master's words of commendation and warning.

1. A commendation that was given. The master did not need to do this, but he graciously says, **“Well done, good and faithful servant!”** (21a, 23a)

2. But listen also to his words of condemnation to the wicked servant.

26 “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the

bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.” (26,27)

3. What Jesus wants us to remember first and foremost is that he is our gracious Savior who also rejoices in our faithfulness. Our highest motivation for serving is that we have an opportunity to show him our gratitude. When we do, he enjoys that. But if we are ever tempted to not be faithful and pursue our selfish agenda, his hard condemnation serves to warn us.

B. Jesus also inspires us by showing the rewards for service.

1. The master in the parable did not owe his servants anything. Nevertheless, he does give them more gifts and even invites them to join him in the celebration he has planned.

We are reminded that every believer is not only given heaven through Jesus' saving work, but there are rewards of grace based on what a person does in life. The Lord Jesus does not have to do this, but in his grace he promises to recognize Christians for the good deeds he enabled them to do.

2. On the other hand the wicked servant is thrown out and loses what he does have, which is earthly blessings. Jesus is clearly stating that he ends up in Hell. Some people may think they are better off not serving Jesus, but he shows that this is not true.

C. So Jesus has not only given us gifts to serve with, but he has given us every reason to serve him. Inspired by his love and faithfulness we want to work at being faithful to him. Serving him we have little to lose and everything to gain.

Conclusion: I started out telling you about the young man John Mark who was unfaithful in service. He was not an unbeliever, he just didn't do the right thing. John Mark grew up and became a faithful servant. St. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:11, **“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”** The Lord had forgiven Mark and he had turned him into a faithful and experienced worker.

The Lord has made us servants by grace in Jesus. By faith we serve in our own way with our own gifts. At times we will stumble and fall. We find forgiveness in Jesus. We pray for help to do better. He gladly and graciously helps us to do the things he wants us to do. He makes us faithful servants. Don't be afraid, but joyfully and thankfully serve. Amen.