

Thirty-third Sunday, Ord. Time Year A

(Prv. 31; 1 Thes 5; Mt 25:14-30)

Join me, if you will, in the world of Charlie Brown – not “our” Charlie Brown – but, the “Peanuts” comic version. Charlie Brown visits Lucy in her “Psychiatric Advice Booth.” The charge is only a nickel, but the wisdom dispensed is priceless! Charlie asks Lucy if she knows what the greatest human burden is? Lucy replies without hesitation: POTENTIAL!

Potential is what our gospel speaks about today. We hear about talents, something of value, not just money or coin. We are all born with them. Some are hidden, some shine like a bright light. Consider the talent of a gifted musician – a person who can bring joy to our hearts with the beauty of their voice or their ability to play the piano or violin or an artist that can bring life to a canvas that can take our breath away. What about the motivational speaker or even a preacher that sets our hearts on fire to do the best we can or “be the best that we can be”. Their talents shine because they are living up to their potential or even exceeding the expectations of others!

Now, truly, not all of us can sing or play the piano, or paint or speak to large crowds effectively, but, we all have God given talents –like the woman whose great worth is beyond the value of pearls because she dedicates herself to raising her family. We don’t have to do great things, yet - we all share in that dreaded burden that Lucy reminds us of: POTENTIAL!

How often have we been told while growing up, or in fact told our children to “Live up to your potential”? The teacher wants to motivate their student, the coach wants to motivate their player; we as parents want to motivate our kids. We give pep talks to remind them that they have a potential to achieve! Sometimes the talks work – at least for a short while.

You see, the real problem with potential is that to reach it, it takes effort, it makes us reach outside of our comfort zone, it takes courage! Often it takes a lifetime of work. Very few of us have a natural talent that does not require real work to accomplish. – God bless those who do!

In the gospel, all three men were given talents, something of value, something to be protected. Two of the men saw their gift as blessings and worked to increase their blessings, to reach their potential and as a result of their efforts, were invited to share in the joy of their Master.

Now the third man received his gift and instead of a blessing, it became a curse for him. **Fear** of his master caused him to seek a safe way to protect his talent, so he hid it or as the gospel says, he buried it – out of sight, out of mind – no worries, no problem!

Now he was not a bad man, he didn’t steal his talent or squander his talent foolishly; he just was not willing to take the risk of losing what he was given and was perfectly happy to simply give back to the master what he had been given! Sometime, fear tempts us to do the same thing! We are afraid that we will be accused of showing off or acting like a big shot if we use our talents. So we take the safe way out. We aren’t willing to take the risk. It makes for a simpler, less complicated life, but what do we have to show for ourselves when we are called to account for how we have spent our life?

Fear of failure or embarrassment, or ridicule sometimes holds us back from reaching our potential or striving for our dreams. Jesus indicates that this attitude is totally unacceptable:

“you worthless, lazy lout.... Throw this worthless servant into the darkness....”

Harsh words, yes, and rarely do we hear Jesus speak in this manor, but He must think it necessary to remind us -point blank, of our obligations to use the gifts or talents He has given us.

God gives these gifts to each of us according to His plan for us. With those talents come the daily opportunity and responsibility to use them for the good of our family, the stranger and those with whom we share this world. Daily, He invites us to enrich our lives and the lives of everyone around us, but, each one of us also has the responsibility to live up to our potential!

We cannot just bury or hide our talent; not use them for the good of others and expect to be invited into the kingdom of God!

William Lifsey

11-13-11