In St. Matthew’s Gospel, this parable of the talents follows immediately after the parable of the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom. That parable reminds us of the need for constant vigilance and watchfulness as we wait for the return of our Lord, a return that can come at any time. The question, then, would naturally arise: “What are we supposed to be doing as we wait for the Lord?” The fact that all the virgins slumbered and slept while they waited might have led some to believe that we should be doing the same—simply waiting for our Lord’s return in a complete withdrawal from the world and its activities. The parable of the talents, however, quickly clears up any such misconceptions as Jesus clearly shows us that while we wait for the Lord, we are to use the time God gives us in serving our Lord and one-another. Instead of doing nothing, God expects us to carefully TEND OUR TALENTS AS A TRUST FROM THE LORD.

The master in this parable represents God who is the Source and Provider of all that we have. Whether its our mental abilities, our physical abilities, our money, our education, our jobs or whatever—every earthly advantage and blessing comes to us from our heavenly Father. As the Psalmist says: “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” (Ps 145:15,16) When we come down to hard facts, no one has anything of his own except his sins. Everything else comes to us from the Lord as a sacred trust.

It’s important that we recognize and remember this fact since our attitude toward our talents will determine what we do with them. The wastefulness of many Americans and the way we have squandered our natural resources is the result of misguided minds that view the world as a playground given to man to do with as he pleases. When man thus replaces God as the source and provider of all, selfishness and greed quickly replace sharing and giving. The rather commonplace sins of gluttony, drunkenness, drug abuse and sexual immorality all reflect this same view which says that man, not God is the center of all things. People say: “It’s my body, and I can do with it as I please. It’s nobody’s business but my own if I get drunk or pop pills or sleep around.” But it is somebody’s business—it’s God’s business, because he is the one who created our bodies, the one who gave us life and who still preserves that life by providing us with all that we have, including our various gifts and abilities. Thus he expects us to take care of our bodies and to tend our talents wisely since they are a trust from him.

Now God obviously doesn’t give each individual the same talents. Our gifts and abilities and even our material blessings vary from one individual to the next. In our parable, he gave one man 5 talents, another one 2 talents, and another one a single talent. But what determined the amount? Jesus says that he gave to each “according to his ability.” In other words, the number of talents in each case corresponded to the master’s judgment of the capacity of each man. So too, the talents God gives each of us varies according to our abilities. In the army, not everyone can be a general. There are privates, corporals, sergeants and many other officers—all with different abilities, experience and responsibilities. In God’s army, that is his church, there is the same kind of diversity. We all have different gifts—one may be a natural leader, someone else may have the ability to teach small children or play the organ, the piano, or some other musical instrument, while another person who lacks such gifts may be blessed with a good business sense or a special ability to counsel and comfort a fellow believer.

When we look at the apostles, we find this same variety of talents. There was only one great apostle to the Gentiles—the Apostle Paul, and while Peter was a leader of the church in Jerusalem, we don’t hear too much about the other apostles. Throughout the history of the church there is this same diversity—some are entrusted with 5 talents, others with 2 and others with only one. But regardless of how God has gifted us, we need to remember that everything we have is a trust from him—something that he has committed to our care and management. Thus it is our responsibility to properly manage whatever gifts he has given us, both mental and material.

Unfortunately, there are times when the differences between individuals leads to envy or jealousy that can undermine the effectiveness of our work and may eventually destroy one’s service for the Lord. Many people spend their lives envying others or feeling sorry for themselves when they should be using whatever talents God has given them to serve their Lord and Savior. The best way to counteract such feelings is to remember that God gives everyone different gifts and abilities, to be content with the whatever talents God has given us, and then use them to the best of our abilities, thereby fulfilling the trust God has given us.
Because our talents are a trust from the Lord, God will hold us accountable for how we have used them. Jesus refers to this in our parable when he says: “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.” Now with the first two servants, the master was quite pleased. He commends them with the words “well done” since they had put their talents to work for their master. The amount they started with or what they gained with that amount really wasn’t important. The key point is their faithful use of their talents. In both cases the Lord says: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

In the same way, God expects us to faithfully use the talents he has given each of us. What’s more, his accounting is personal, not general. He doesn’t judge us on the basis of what someone else has accomplished or what our church or our synod has done. He’s only concerned with how each of us use whatever gifts and abilities he has given us. Naturally, he expects more from those who have many talents than from those who have few, just as the servant with 5 talents gained 5 more and the servant with 2 talents gained 2 more. Jesus says: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Luke 12:48)

Unfortunately, there’s a lot of unused potential going to waste in congregations today because many Christians fail to use their particular talents for serving in God’s kingdom. Many seem to be content with just coming to church now and then and contributing their “dues” without ever getting more involved in the Lord’s work. As a result, voters’ meetings are poorly attended, Sunday School teachers are becoming scarce, and many service opportunities go unfulfilled. Such indifference and non-involvement is actually equivalent to the servant who hid his talent in the earth and let it lie idle. He’s a perfect picture of all those in the church who for one reason or another refuse to use their gifts in Christ’s service. This servant wasn’t condemned because he hid his talent—there was nothing dishonest about that, but it reflected his own laziness. He didn’t even have enough ambition to put it in the bank and let it draw interest for his master. Thus his single talent was of no use to his master.

Within our congregation, there are many opportunities for all of us to use our talents—physical, mental and material—in God’s service. However, you may have a particular gift or talent that we don’t know about—one for which we may or may not have a particular organization or committee that is in line with your special gift. Part of the problem is the fact that we tend to approach people with a specific list of needs or areas of service, which may not be in line with the talent that God has given you. Thus in the weeks after Easter, we are going to be talking to all of our members, to see what it is that you do best, what it is that you like to do, and how we can help you to utilize whatever talent God has given you as part of our member ministry here at Centennial. Instead of coming to you with a checklist of what we need, we will simply be asking you to share with us whatever it is that you are good at or like to do in an effort to improve and expand our ministry to you and to one another as fellow members of God’s family.

It will be up to you, of course, to decide when and how you would like to use your talent in the service of our Lord. However, whenever there’s an opportunity to help and you feel that you have been gifted in that particular area, don’t look around to see if someone else can do the job or is better qualified than you. Since we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, we should not hesitate to do whatever we can to assist one another as we work together in carrying out our Lord’s great commission to make disciples out of all nations by sharing the good news about our Savior with one and all. Remember what Paul said in our second lesson? “To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” In other words, in each of us the Holy Spirit shows himself through whatever gift or ability he has given us, not just for ourselves but “for the common good,” that is, for the benefit of fellow members of God’s family.

Sometimes we’re tempted to discredit ourselves by thinking that there’s not too much that we can do. But the fact is that there’s always something that we could be doing if we’re given the right opportunity, and we would like to develop more opportunities for service within our congregation based upon your individual gifts and abilities. For example, in next month’s newsletter, you will be hearing about a new “Care Card” ministry that we are in the process of implementing. All it takes is a little time and a lot of caring for fellow members of our Centennial family and for those who still do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

As Christians, we have been blessed by the Lord with spiritual riches beyond compare in addition to the talents he has given us. God has graciously called us to faith and made us fellow members of his kingdom having the certain hope of eternal life with Christ. But until that hope is realized, he expects us to work together in serving one another in whatever way we can as brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen