

**BEAMING WITH PRIDE
FATHER'S DAY 2015**

19"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' 21"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' 22"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' 23"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

As many of you know, this has been a big year in the Hillenbrand household. In December, my son David graduated from college, came home to an internship, and just last week began working at a job in Fond du Lac helping design and create playground equipment for communities and schools. It's a perfect job for him as his degree is in designing -- and he gets to do it for kids! I'm so proud of him.

Then last week, it was my daughter Michelle, who graduated from Law school. She accepted a position in NYC working for a large, corporate law firm -- especially in Intellectual Property and/or Mergers and Acquisitions. Assuming she passes the New York bar exam, she will be starting in September. I'm also proud of her.

In addition, I am pleased be living within just a few miles to Becky and Clay, who most of you know -- glad to see her working to bring physical therapy relief to many patients and Clay to be advancing in his career at Honeywell.

So...it's been a year of beaming with pride for the Hillenbrands. Celebrating accomplishments, seeing my children grow into responsible adults, and rejoicing in the good things God will accomplish through them. It may be one of the best Father's Days ever in my 26 years of being a parent.

Beaming with pride. The reason I bring it all up, however, is not to brag about my kids (well, much), but rather because, on this Father's Day, my moments of pride made me think about our Heavenly Father and His joy at His children and their work. And I'd like to spend a little time talking about that today.

You see, as Lutherans when we hear the words “well done good and faithful servant,” we immediately balk and fall back on our Lutheran theology. We know that we are, by nature, sinful and unclean, and that, on our own, we deserve nothing but God’s wrath and punishment. We are, all of us, infected with a core of selfishness and greed; and every day we displease our God in so many ways. As St. Paul says in Ephesians:

“1As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”

So, with a keen awareness of our sin, when we hear these words of praise offered in Jesus’ parable, we immediately hang our heads and know that such words should never come to us -- that our only hope is to be linked to the perfect life and sacrifice of Him who died for us on the cross of Calvary. Lutherans are a people who understand grace -- that God came to us in our lostness, in our evil, and enabled us to be forgiven despite our nature. We are right to think this way. Christ Jesus is to be praised above all; and His sacrifice is everything!

And yet, brothers and sisters in Christ, I think we miss something when we don’t hear these words as, in some sense, being offered by the Lord to His people for the good works and faithful actions He has engendered in us.

You see, when the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, He doesn’t just bring us faith and leave us alone to do as we please. No, He is there molding and shaping us to be the people He calls us to be -- to employ our gifts and our talents -- our willingness to serve and our enlightened generosity to do genuine good. And God’s work in us IS a cause for joy to the Heavenly Father because He has reshaped and reformed us away from darkness and into the light.

Imagine a beautiful piece of pottery, formed and shaped by the potter to be a fitting decoration in the place where he desires it to be. And then, all of a sudden, the piece falls to the ground and cracks into a thousand pieces.

And then the potter picks up each piece and gently and carefully brings it back together so that it is a reflection of its original beauty. Don’t you think He beams with pride not only

because of His ability to repair, but also because of the beauty that has been restored? Of course He does.

Or a painter who has created a masterpiece only to have some madman come and splash paint all over the canvas. When the painter removes all the stain, do you not think He rejoices not only in what He has done, but also in the beauty of the painting He has created? Of course He does.

So, when the Holy Spirit works His work of sanctification in us -- motivating us to use our talents and gifts to serve the Lord and transforming our heart to love one another in word and action, God does beam with pride -- He does shout out, "well done, good and faithful servant" -- He does peer at what He has accomplished IN US, and rejoices that we are His masterpiece.

So let's not diminish His joy IN US by thinking of ourselves purely and completely as poor, miserable sinners. Let us also recognize that when He accomplishes something good and employs our specific gifts to do it, that He is pleased not just with the obedience of His Son that covers over our sin, but also with the sanctified person He has enabled us to be.

So... let's say it.

It brings joy to our Father's heart when you and I invest ourselves in worship.

It brings joy to our Father's heart when you and I give away from ourselves to accomplish His work. Time, treasure, and talent.

It brings joy to our Father's heart when we win a battle with temptation, when we serve Him selflessly to display the Gospel in word and action, when we step forward and say "yes" to doing something to make a difference in His kingdom.

God brims with pride when He sees Sunday School teachers teaching. Nurses taking care of their patients. Information Technology folks keeping the computers running and security intact. He rejoices to see pastors preaching His word creatively, moms raising their children with Christian morals and principles, students doing their schoolwork to the best of their ability. And the list could go on and on. But you get the idea. Our Father is proud of the sheep of His pasture. He is filled with gladness as He sees His work being accomplished and His will being done through us.

I wonder. How do you feel about this truth? Does it make you feel uncomfortable, because you know, deep down, that the old sinful human nature continues to drag you down and seeks constantly to undermine all that we might do to please the Father heart's? -- that the sinful nature and the Tempter can, with a simple snap of the fingers, often turn your generosity into self-pride, turn your faithful actions into works that seek praise, turn your talents and gifts into something you deem your own?

If you're like many Christians, of course it does. Because we are sinners and because, so often, even the things we do which appear good, are not done with the right motives and leave us still falling short of God's goodness.

But make no mistake about it. As the blood of Jesus covers over all of that and puts it as far away from us as the east is from the west, so also, then, in Christ, can our Heavenly Father beam with pride at the things He accomplishes in us, through us, and by us.

So it is not a bad thing to ask ourselves daily, "How does this thing that I'm doing, or that plan I am making affect my loving Heavenly Father? Is He rejoicing to see how the Spirit is working in me to use my gifts and talents? Is He celebrating the fact that He made me who I am and is accomplishing certain things through me? Or, am I underestimating the Spirit's ability to use me and am I underutilizing the gifts He's given me? Should I take new steps, different steps, maybe bolder steps to serve Him in new places?

Thank God that whether we feel the former or the latter that Jesus' blood and righteousness still overshadows our own works and is the sole basis for our future in glory. He is well pleased when we are in faith, when we cling to Him for mercy, and when we trust in Him to lead us forward.

But on this Father's Day, may we especially challenge ourselves to maximize the good things that He enables us to do and to make ourselves available to do even more.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.