Proper 28, Year A – Track 2

The Collect:

Rite I:
Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them; that, by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Rite II:
Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Old Testament: Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

7 Be silent before the Lord God,
for the day of the Lord is at hand!
The Lord has prepared a sacrifice;
he has consecrated his guests.

12 At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the people
who settle like dregs in wine,
those who say in their hearts,
"The Lord will not do good,
nor will he do harm."

13 Their wealth shall be plundered
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.

14 The great day of the Lord is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter;
the warrior cries aloud there.
15 That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
16 a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.

17 I will bring such distress upon people
that they shall walk like the blind;
because they have sinned against the Lord,
their blood shall be poured out like dust
and their flesh like dung.
18 Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the Lord's wrath;
in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be consumed,
for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Psalm: Psalm 90:1-8, (9-11), 12

1 Lord, you have been our refuge *
from one generation to another.
2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
or the land and the earth were born, *
from age to age you are God.
3 You turn us back to the dust and say, *
"Go back, O child of earth."
4 For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past *
and like a watch in the night.
5 You sweep us away like a dream; *
we fade away suddenly like the grass.
6 In the morning it is green and flourishes; *
in the evening it is dried up and withered.
7 For we consume away in your displeasure; *
we are afraid because of your wrathful indignation.
8 Our iniquities you have set before you, *
and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
9 [When you are angry, all our days are gone; *
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.
10 The span of our life is seventy years,
perhaps in strength even eighty; *
yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow,
for they pass away quickly and we are gone.
11 Who regards the power of your wrath? *
who rightly fears your indignation?]
12 So teach us to number our days *
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need
to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day
of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "There is peace and
security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon
a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, brothers and sisters, are
not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of
light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So, then, let

us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober, [7] for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation. [9] For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

[14] "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; [15] to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once [16] the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. [17] In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. [18] But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. [19] After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. [20] Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' [21] His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' [22] And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' [23] His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' [24] Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, [25] so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' [26] But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? [27] Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. [28] So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. [29] For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have

nothing, even what they have will be taken away. [30] As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

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SERMONS THAT WORK

Pentecost 25 (P28)

[RCL] Judges 4:1-7; Psalm 123; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

Multiply the Gift

Our gospel reading continues this week with another parable, this time the parable of the talents In the first century, the Greek word talanton (τάλαντον) meant a unit of weight used for precious metals, and therefore a unit for reckoning very large sums of money. It's not just a coin that could get you a sack of flour. For example, a denarius, which was the Roman silver coin at the time, was a daily wage for a common laborer or soldier. A talent, gold or silver, was about 33 kg. Commonly, a talent was reckoned as about 6000 denarii. That means a talent is the equivalent of 6000 working days, roughly 16 years of labor.

Think about that? How much money is your annual salary times 16? I bet that's not a negligible amount. It's definitely more than a coin. So, even the slave that got only *one* talent, actually got a ridiculous amount of money.

We have then these three slaves, who are all entrusted with fortunes of different magnitudes. The one who gets the most doubles it; the one who gets considerably less also doubles it. And they both receive the same praise from the master, both are invited to step into their master's joy and will be entrusted with other things, because they have proved their trustworthiness.

The third slave receives this fortune, and, although it is a lot less than the other two, it is still a fortune. And he doesn't trust himself to do something good with it, so he buries it. Nothing good can come out of it when it is buried into the ground out of fear. When it is time for him to account to his master what he did with the talent, he blames the master for being harsh: "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest."

The master is saying that even if those things were true about him—and the slave thought him harsh—he could still have done something safe with the talent, something that held practically no risk of loss. But instead the slave chose to bury it.

Over the centuries we have lost the usage of the word talent for units of measure of fine metals. The word evolved to mean just what we now hear: special natural ability of aptitude. And that meaning actually

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derives from this parable. By the 15th century AD a talent meant a "gift committed to one for use and improvement". In many Christian traditions a "talent" is interpreted as a gift that God gives us that we must make use of and not keep it hidden.

And it is absolutely true that we should be confident and secure in the gifts given to us by God. But there is an important, small detail here in the story that can push us from this idea of individualistic importance and self-improvement to what actually makes the kingdom of God.

In his sermon on this text, John Chrysostom says: "For nothing is so pleasing to God, as to live for the common advantage. For this end God gave us speech, and hands, and feet, and strength of body, and mind, and understanding, that we might use all these things, both for our own salvation, and for our neighbor's advantage."

In other words, the gifts of God are never just about us as *individuals*. Yes, they are given *to* us, but they are not given only *for* us. The talents have to benefit the community. They have to benefit the whole Body of Christ.

Parables are wonderful, because they can be read in so many ways and they always have something to teach us. We can read this parable and hear a message about money, and that message would be true. We can read this parable and hear a message about our talents, our God-given gifts, and that message would be true… Now, what if this enormous fortune that is entrusted to each one of the slaves is love? Let's see what happens when we read it that way. One slave receives five enormous measures of love and immediately goes out and puts it out there and soon it doubles. The one that receives two measures does the same. They both double what they got. The love of God, shining through them, multiplied the love that exists in the world.

And the third one buried it in the ground. Didn't share it, didn't even hold on to it, but out of fear buried it into the ground, that it could not even be enjoyed by himself nor by others.

Seen in this light, the third slave doesn't come across as unsavvy and cautious, he comes across as selfish and afraid. He is closed off to the possibility of being in relationship. Instead of investing in community, he refuses to participate.

This is a useful way of reading this passage because it frees us from a vision of life as a constant self-improvement journey. God doesn't ask us to inventory our gifts and make sure we constantly optimize them. Instead, God asks us to be open to receiving this immense gift—this gift of love—and then using it. Spread it. Share it in community with generosity. What are we doing as Christians if we are not living into this love freely given to us by giving it freely to others in a way that multiplies the gift?

Because that is how love works, right?

In a worldly way, we tend to think that if we give something away, then we have *less* of it. That is certainly true of money. If someone gives you a hundred dollars, then they have a hundred dollars less than they had before.

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But love does not work like that. If we love another person well, we have not depleted some finite supply of love that we now need to replenish. And what's more: there is more love now in the world because that person will pass it along to those with whom they are in relationship. The person who receives that love now has love that they can share with someone else. Maybe they are more patient with their children. Maybe they welcome someone. Maybe they forgive.

And suddenly the love that we received from God and given to one person is moving through people we may never even meet.

That is a pretty extraordinary "return on an investment." We will never know what the final number is. We don't get to track how much good our love produced or how far it travelled. Only God knows that final tally.

Our work is to receive what God has given us and put it back into circulation. And in that way, an enormous fortune grows.

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