"Teach us to count our days so that
we may gain a wise heart." AMEN!

(Sing!)
"And even though we ain't got money
I'm so in love with you, honey
And everything will bring a chain of love

And in the morning, when I rise
You bring a tear of joy to my my eyes
And tell me everything is gonna be alright"

Danny's Song was written by Kenny Loggins and
released in 1971.

Loggins and Messina recorded it as a gift
to Kenny Loggins' brother at the birth of their son.

And it came to mind this week because
we get to talk about money today.

Always a favorite in church, right?!

Yet, as we move closer to Christ the King Sunday
and then begin the Season of Advent
we are reminded of the need to refocus
our priorities, and

we know the ways money becomes

more important than God sometimes.

Today we are reminded of its place, as a tool,
a tool to do good things. (Pause)

A short story… Every Friday, Freda counted
the money left in her account after paying the bills,

and most weeks she'd wished there was more.

One evening her grandson watched her at
the kitchen table and tugged on her sleeve.

"Are we poor, Grandma?" the grandson asked.

Freda glanced around her home.

The pantry was full.

Her coat hung in the closet, and
the house was warm.

"Well, no," Freda said slowly.

"I suppose I've just been counting only
the things in my wallet."

She then turned over one of the envelopes and
made a different kind of list.

It began with a home, food, people who loved her,

people she loved, strength enough to do work.

The next morning, Freda noticed
her neighbor Ron carrying groceries home on foot.

His car needed a repair that he couldn't afford,
and he'd been walking to work all week.

Freda thought of the money she had set aside
to buy a new recliner.

Her current one was old and it sagged,
but still held her just fine.

As Ron walked up his driveway, Freda
went to him and asked,

"Would you let me help you with the car repair?"

Ron looked down at the grocery sacks and replied,
"I don't know how long it will take for me
to repay you."

Freda shrugged and said, "You don't need to."

The next week, Freda's grandson
found her counting again.

"Is there less this week?" He asked.

She replied, "In the wallet, yes."

They both heard a car give a quick honk.

They turned to see Ron driving on his way to work.

They waved and Ron waved back.

Freda added another item to her list: Enough to share.
(Pause)

In the gospel last week, you'll recall,
we were reminded to be ready to come prepared
with extra oil as we wait for the delayed Jesus.

Now, we are told another difficult parable about
using the talents that God has entrusted to us.

Don't be confused!

The word talent here does not mean
a certain ability or gift like
playing the violin or having patience.

The word talent in Jesus' parable has to do with money.

And not just a bit of it, but a hefty sum of money.

One talent was about 20 years of wages
for an ordinary laborer in Jesus' day.

The parable told us that one received 5 talents,

another received 2, and
the third received 1.

Even the person that has 1 talent has a small fortune,
but the one who received 5 talents was getting
more than he could make in a lifetime.

Set aside everything in your mind and
just let that aspect of the parable sink in.

What would you and I do with such an amount of money?
(Pause)

As the story moves forward we find out what each
of them did with their fortunes entrusted to them.

Then, after a long time of being away,
the man who entrusted the slaves with
the varieties of financial fortunes returned
for an accounting of what each had done.

Also know as… Judgement Day.

The first two slaves doubled the return on
their master's investment.

The majority of the parable, though,
resides in what we learn from the third servant,
and thus reminds us the most important
teaching point of the parable.

The third one took his 20 years of wages (1 talent)
and dug a hole in the ground and buried it.

He did it to keep it safe and to protect the treasure.

It was a common practice in the ancient days,
kind of like hiding extra money in your mattress. :-)

This practice does not seem to be the thing
that upsets the generous one whose
entrusted so much wealth to the three
as much as the reason why the man
did what he did.

“I knew you were a harsh man,
reaping where you did not sow,
gathering where you did not scatter seeds.”

And if we are to associate God with the one
whose entrusted so much to these three,
we find important wisdom for the ways
we too are called to utilize the tool of money,
in our lives and not be afraid to use it
to build God’s kingdom on earth.

Many of us are entrusted with
financial resources of great value, what do we do
with those financial tools? (Pause)

The parable is about money and it is about
our fear of losing it.

The lesson is to overcome the fear of losing money
and gain the courage to use it to further
God's promise of love and mercy.

Can you believe God has entrusted so much to us?

When we can use the resources, entrusted
financial gifts, to remove, or help to remove
another's burdens,

we live an ethical life because we respond positively
to what is demanded of us.

Like it's written in Zephaniah,
"We don't settle like dregs in wine."

We rise up and make use of what has been
entrusted to us and share with others as
God's love is shared.

AMEN!

We continue now our journey of personal testimonies from people who have found St. Stephen to be a special place. A community that's worthy of being entrusted to lead people to pursue the ethical life. I'm happy to welcome Simone Schuster to the microphone to tell us his story.