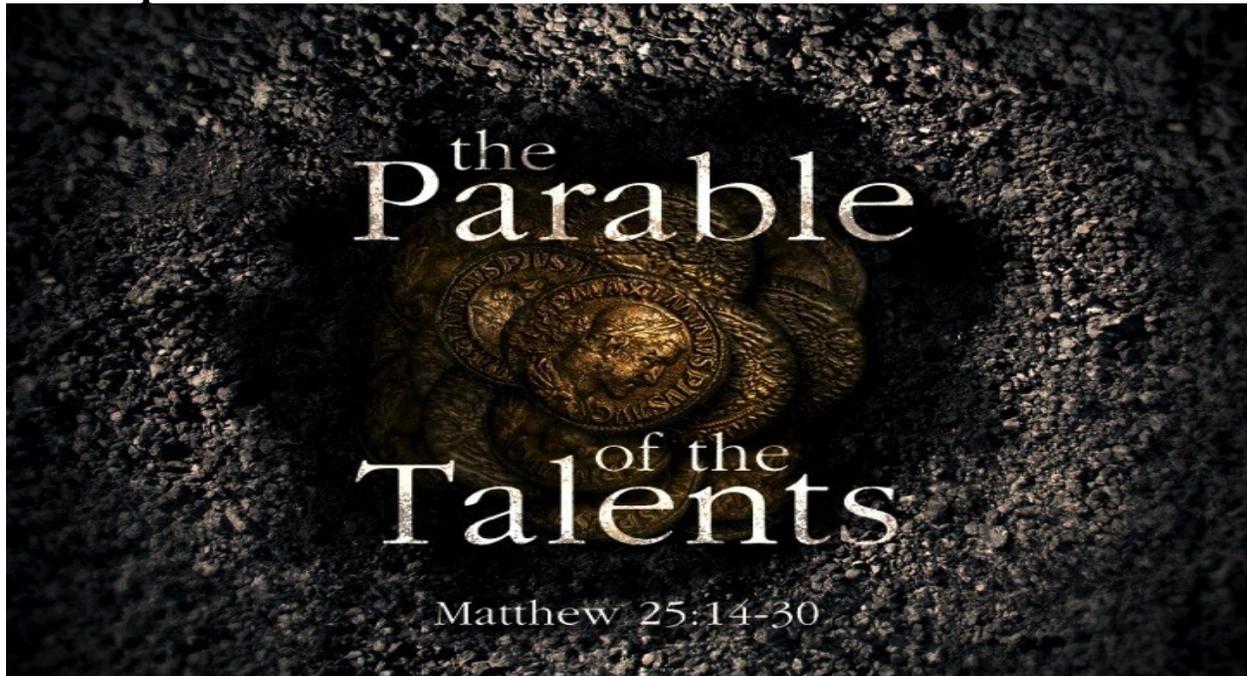


Worship at Home Guide



November 15, 2020

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gathering Question/Gathering Music

Opening Sentences Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you created the heavens and the earth, and humankind in your image. Teach us to discern your hand in all your works and to serve you with reverence and thanksgiving. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn #852 "When the Lord Redeems the Very Least"¹

When the Lord redeems the very least, we will rejoice,

When the hungry gather for the feast, we will rejoice.

(Chorus) We will rejoice with gladness, we will rejoice.

All our days we'll sing to God in praise. We will rejoice!

When the Lord restores the sick and weak, we will rejoice,

When the earth is given to the meek, we will rejoice. (Chorus)

When the Lord revives the world from death, we will rejoice,

When the word of God fills every breathe, we will rejoice. (Chorus)

When the Lord returns in victory, we will rejoice,

When we live in glorious liberty, we will rejoice. (Chorus)

Hymnal interpretation: What does it mean to pray “Thy kingdom come?” This text by Sylvia Dunstan (modeled loosely on Psalm 126) sketches out some of the features that help us to know when God’s reign has truly come. The energy of the gospel song tune by Albert Brumley adds to the sense of rejoicing repeatedly proposed in the text.

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Prayer of Confession

Jesus said: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled. Trusting in God’s grace, let us offer to God our prayers...

Jesus said: Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

In the name of Jesus the Christ, receive God’s mercy as we are forgiven!

Amen.

Hymn #749 “Come, Live In The Light!”²

Verse 1

Come! Live in the light! Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord! We are called to be light for the kingdom, to live in the freedom of the city of God.

Refrain

We are called to act with justice; we are called to love tenderly
we are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.

Verse 2

Sing! Sing a new song! Sing of that great day when all will be one! God will reign and we’ll walk with each other as sisters and brothers united in love.

Refrain

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Scripture/Meditation Matthew 25:14-30

The Parable of the Talents

Jesus taught, saying, “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 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.’

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.’

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.’

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.’ 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 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.

So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Questions for Reflection and Discernment

1. What questions do you have for Matthew as the storyteller?
2. What question(s) would you like to ask Jesus about this teaching?
3. What word or phrase catches your eye/ear in this text?
4. What does this parable suggest to you about the kingdom of God?
5. What is important? What does the king (representing God?) say is important?
6. What is the largest sum of money someone has entrusted to you?
7. What have you been taught in any church you’ve belonged to about taking risks?

Anthem

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

O Lord, strengthen our faith. Nourish it with passion and love towards you....

Nourish it with passion and love for our neighbors as we offer prayers for them...

Nourish it with passion and love for our enemies as we offer prayers for them...

Nourish it with passion and love for the world...hear now our prayers for the world...

Nourish it with passion and love for ourselves...hear now our prayers for ourselves...

Almighty God, whose Word we trust, whose Spirit equips us to pray, we continue to pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn “God, Be The Love To Search and Keep Me”³

God, be the love to search and keep me; God be the prayer to move my voice; God, be the strength to now uphold me: O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.

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Sharing of the Peace: Sharing Jesus' invitation to his disciples:

Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you!

— Resources from the Book of *Common Worship and Glory to God Hymnal*, PCUSA

Interpretation of the Scripture

The Parable of the Talents is the third of three parables arranged by Matthew around the theme of judgment, a topic that is important to this gospel writer. The first, the [Parable of the Slave Left in Charge](#) (Matthew 24:45-51), focuses on the accountability of church leaders. The second, the [Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins](#) (Matthew 25:1-13), focuses on the general responsibilities of ordinary Christians. Matthew 25:14-30, the [Parable of the Talents](#), examines the obligations of those who have been granted special gifts.

As with the preceding parables, we can assume that several of these details have allegorical significance for Matthew. The servants are entrusted with large amounts of money, equivalent to the earnings of a day laborer for twenty years. Luke also tells this story, but in a different way. For instance, in Luke's telling, each slave gets the same amount while in Matthew the three are given different sums, "to each according to his ability", a detail suggesting that Matthew regards the entrusted money as representing different gifts, not something shared equally by all Christians, such as the gospel or the gift of life.

The differing gifts are wisely conferred; no servant is given more than he is capable of handling. Even the one with the least ability is given a significant responsibility. In Matthew's telling, each slave determines what to do with what they have been given. The first and the second double their amounts, the third chooses to settle for what was given.

The first and second servants are rewarded for their faithful labor with a warm commendation and an invitation, "Enter into the joy of our master." Despite this, the parable gives far more attention to the negative example and disastrous fate of the third slave. It is for this reason the parable is justly called a parable of judgment.

The slave rationalizes his failure to do anything with the talent entrusted to him by blaming his master! He knows him as a harsh businessman, a "sharp dealer" who extracts far more from a business transaction than is his proper due ("reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow"). The slave has feared what might happen if he failed, not considering the master's gift to be an honor but a terrifying responsibility.

Whereas the slave characterized himself as being afraid, the master calls him lazy, saying that at the very least the slave should have invested the money with bankers in order that a small profit would have resulted.

The parable makes no attempt to examine the causes of the slave's laziness, but one factor is evident from the dialogue: the slave has no love for his master. He is really interested only in himself, and consequently security, not service, is his goal. There is not the slightest trace of gratitude that his master trusted him with so great a sum.

If we are correct in taking the phrase “to each according to [their] ability” as indicating that for Matthew the parable challenges Christians to make full use of the gifts that God has entrusted to them, the portrayal of the third servant reminds us that love for our master must be demonstrated in faithful and untiring service to other people. It is routine for Christians to excuse themselves by protesting that their gifts are too modest to be significant. This parable insists that the gifts are precious and are to be used to the full.

—from *Matthew, A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching*, Douglas R.A. Hare

Meditation on Matthew 25:14-30

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Blessings in God’s name on this 24th Sunday after Pentecost, or the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. We are coming to the end of the most extended time in the church year, the time referred to as Ordinary Time, so named not because it is a time of low expectations but because it is a time that does not have a holiday, like Christmas or Easter, or the context of a specifically devoted season, such as Advent or Lent. It is a season of growth and the liturgical color is green. For the remaining Sundays of Ordinary Time before the First Sunday of Advent on November 29th, we will be reading and reflecting on the teaching sections from the Gospel of Matthew.

The story speaks of talents, in this case money, not personal abilities. A talent was a very large sum of money: six thousand days’ wages for a common laborer, or 15 to 20 years of wages. Thus, five talents would have been a stupendous amount of money, two a large amount, and even one would have been a significant amount. The man/master is heading off on a journey and shares from his largess these large amounts with three of his slaves.

It is the third of four stories in Matthew that are set in the context of Jesus’ last week of life. Transferred into the life of the Matthean community, they are to be understood as stories told to illustrate and illuminate behavior on the part of Jesus’ disciples between the time of his death and resurrection and his second coming. Each center on the return of the master or bridegroom or king, the judgments that come with that return, and how those who wait the return are to spend their life. Jesus is quoted as speaking with his disciples while he is still with them, in this case in Jerusalem, speaking about the eschaton, about the return of the Son of Man. The church Matthew writes to is given guidance as to how they are to live in the wake of the first while waiting for the second.

The Greek word *talenta* can be transliterated into the English word “talent,” which has long given rise to the use of this story as a stewardship text, as the basis for an assessment of what God has done with us. This is important. The text in the context of Matthew has the emphasis of end of times, in which the focus is more necessarily what God will do with us. That is not to discount that two of the three slaves are actually very good stewards. They take what they have been given and “traded with them” in some form or fashion, in each case increasing the original amount by one hundred percent.

The story is minimal in the telling of the behavior of these two slaves, as we do not learn what “trad(ing) with them” consisted of, nor anything else about them, beyond the urgency with which

at least the first slave acts, as we're told that the first "went off at once" and it is implied that this was equally true with the second. We are told that these first two slaves are affirmed by their master, and we then experience how it is the third slave's behavior that dominates the rest of the story. What do you make of this? Is this a pure economic story? How do you feel, what do you think about the man/master's behavior?

The third slave goes and buries the money he has been given. It was a prudent thing to do. The action limited the risk of losing anything or everything, the only challenge being to remember where the money had been buried when the man/master returned from his journey. This practice is one reason why the idea of "buried treasure" is more than simply a plot line in books. People buried treasures because it was the safest way to keep them from being lost or stolen. Is the prudent thing the thing that God wants us to do?

When the third slave returns the talent (remember, 15-20 years' worth of the salary of a laborer which, say in today's money a yearly salary of \$30,000 translates into one talent being worth upwards of \$600,000), to the master upon his return, he is criticized. In fact, he is rebuked by the master. The latter is angry that the slave had not sought to make a return on his money, even if it was in the form of interest paid by bankers, implying that the slave owed him, at minimum, that much (or little).

As a result, the talent is taken away from him and given to the one who had turned five into ten. Does that mean that the first two slaves were able to keep what had been given as well as what they had earned? Or does it simply mean that the master wants to reward the first slave as a part of punishing the third? And the third slave is cast into "the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," presumably ongoing despair. What kind of master is this? Does this story, told by Jesus, retold by Matthew, want us to understand the master as God? No wonder we defer to talents and gifts rather than an economic measure. It's safer!

The slave apparently has little respect for the master, sharing with him: "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." The slave admits to being "afraid" as a rationale for his behavior. If God is to be understood as the master in this story, in terms of the relationship with the third slave, then it is truly a fear-full story. To state that and to stop there overlooks much of the rest of the story.

The master is portrayed as being generous with all three of the slaves. While the degree of generosity is distinct, each of the slaves is entrusted with a substantial sum based on what the master thought each slave could handle. Each is not only given a substantial amount, but also the same opportunity. Two of the three embrace the gift by risking, resulting in doubling the sum. The third, fueled by fear, chooses not to risk or trust.

How does fear fuel our lives, limiting our willingness to take risks and to trust whether with money or abilities? How have we embodied messages of fear implicitly or explicitly in our lives, causing us to freeze rather than flourish? How does God desire us to take risks to thrive and not merely survive? How is the punishment meted out to the third slave a reality we impose upon ourselves when we do not take risks? Can we see God in this story as the one who is generous

with us—who trusts us—in our lives in a unique if not equal way as One whose desire for us is to thrive—even at the risk of failure—in living?

Amen.