

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

35th Sunday of Quarantine (37th Overall)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Psalms 90:1-8[9-11]12

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

11/15/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 14“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20Then 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.’ 21His 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.’ 22And 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.’ 23His 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.’ 24Then 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; 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ 26But 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? 27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29For 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. 30As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Talents

Good morning! Well! While our Gospel story doesn’t seem to be the most uplifting of lessons, I promise you that there is more than meets the eye with our text. We pick our story up directly after the lesson from last week. So Jesus delivers a strange story about bridesmaids, then follows it up with this gem about servants. In it a man going on a trip entrusts three of his servants with responsibility over three different gifts. The first receives 5 talents, the second 2, and the third 1. When the owner returns,

the first two have doubled the value, while the third hasn't done anything with what they were given. The owner and the third servant argue, and the servant is thrown out.

The first thing to understand is that these servants were given astronomical amounts of money. One scholar writes that “*A talent was equivalent approximately 6,000 denarii, that is, the earnings of a day laborer for twenty years.*”¹ But it's more than that, and this is where my mind was blown. A gold talent was roughly the equivalent of something over 110 pounds, or 50 kilograms. Which, at the price of gold would mean that it was worth \$3,038,900... And that was just one talent! The first servant was given 15 million dollars! So, we're talking some serious cash here! Frankly, I'm amazed that the servants were able to do anything with that kind of cash. Burying something that weighs that much seems like the only viable option.

As I discussed last week, we find ourselves in the same place in the Gospel today. We're at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, and Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for life after his death and resurrection. It's also a lesson for the reader, both in the first century and now. It forces us to realize that being a Christian means that we live in certain ways that do honor to what God has given us.

You almost feel sad for the third servant. It's clear that they have completely misunderstood the landowner. The servant accuses them of being selfish and greedy, but the description doesn't fit. We see the generosity of the landowner in the story when we find out that the first two servants are given the money they raised! That's right, the first servant takes home around 33 million dollars' worth at the end of the day!

¹Hare, Douglas R. *Matthew*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 286.

We've all had friends like the third servant. People who have gone their whole life and never really understood the love and generosity that are a part of God. For them, God is an evil being, usually a man, some all knowing guy-in-the-sky who acts like Santa Claus, putting all the "good" people on one list, and all the "bad" people on another. We see this characterization all the time in TV and cinema. But all of this fails to see God as God truly is, a being full of love and grace that has a deep and abiding love for each and every one of us, even those society has turned our backs on.

And grace is really what this story is all about anyway. One scholar, writing about this text says *"Its message is positive action instead of fearful or lazy inaction."*² How do we respond to that free gift of grace that God offers? We can let it shine, showing the world something that is beyond all value, or we can bury it in the dirt, ignoring what God intended for all the world.

So, how do we let God's grace shine? It seems like everyone has a different idea, but here is one suggestion: see the love of Christ in each and every person that you meet. It can feel like we are more polarized now than we have ever been before, but if we look and see the mark of Christ on that person we can't understand, it invites a path towards love and support. When we stop and think about how our comments or actions might hurt our brothers and sisters, it's a step in the right direction. One scholar writes that *"Matthew uses the story to fill in the content of the nature of the Christian life as 'waiting' for the parousia. The meaning of being 'good and faithful' is not mere theological correctness, passive waiting, or strict*

² Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991. p. 354.

obedience to clear instruction, but active responsibility that takes initiative and risk. In the story, the master gives no instructions as to what is to be done with the money, so faithfulness is not merely obedience to directions. Each servant must decide how to use [their] time during the master's absence.”³ So, what are you going to do with your gift? Amen.

³ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 7. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 336.