

Pentecost 24, November 15, 2020 (Mt 25:14-30; Zeph 1:7, 12-18; Ps 90:1-4)

The holy gospel according to Matthew, the 25th chapter (25:14-30). This text begins immediately after the end of last week's, where the bridegroom slammed the door in the faces of the five foolish maidens.

The kingdom of heaven will be as if a man was going on a journey and called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents ["talent" has nothing to do with abilities; a talent in those days was more than 15 years' wages for a laborer], to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. The man who had received the five talents went off immediately and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the man who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man 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 faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share the joy of your master." The man with the two talents also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more." 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 the joy of your master!"

Then the man who had received the one talent 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 went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you." His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! 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." Then he said to the others present, "Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to all 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. And throw this worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The scripture texts for today, nearing the end of the “church year” before Advent begins on November 29th, and for the rest of the year all have an end-time focus. This life is a good gift from God, and when it ends we look forward to eternity with God. It’s not an either/or thing. Whether we live or die, we *are* with the Lord. The six weeks leading up to Christmas help us recognize the importance of “appropriate living.”

In the gospel parable the master *entrusts* money to his servants (or slaves; the same Greek word can be translated either way). He gives it with the understanding that they’ll use it wisely. On his return he has lavish praise for the two men who doubled his money. But the servant who simply buried the money is in trouble with the master.

You need to understand that one *talent* was a *lot* of money! A normal day’s wage for a worker was one denarius; and it would have taken anywhere from fifteen to twenty *years* to earn a single talent. So it was no small responsibility that the master entrusted to his servants!

I don’t know about you, but I have some sympathy for the last servant, the one who buried the talent he was given. He knew his master drove a hard bargain, and he didn’t want to risk losing what was entrusted to him. Burying money, or treasure, was one of the safest ways to preserve it back then. (No comment about present-day finances!)

But the master became enraged at the third servant, calling him *wicked* and *lazy*. Instead of getting to keep the original talent, he had it taken away—and he was cast out, **into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

This parable can be interpreted in different ways. I’m going with the idea that the *talents* given by the *master* to the *servants* are the gift of the *gospel* from *God* to the *church*. The *gospel* is the good news that in Christ God is reconciling the world to himself for now and eternity. So: Master = God; talents = the gospel; servants = church (the body of Christ; the people).

That *good news* is for all people of every time and every place. God’s purpose in sending Jesus, his Son, was to call people out of darkness to live in his light, so that at the end of this age they wouldn’t be cast **into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

Judgment isn’t for the purpose of condemning people. It’s God’s way of saying, you don’t want that in your future, and neither do I—so come to me now. Prepare yourself for eternal life with me in my heavenly kingdom.

Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, went to the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He did it during his life, reaching out to physically touch those who themselves were cast out from the rest of society.

He did it between his burial and his resurrection, when he descended into hell to preach the good news to the poor souls who had died without knowing the goodness and mercy of God. He went as far away from God as it's humanly possible to go, in order to bring God to those places.

That's the good news, the gospel, which is ours through our baptism into the body of Christ. We've been blessed—*sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever*—in order to *be* a blessing to others. We've been called and chosen as *disciples*—followers of Jesus—in order to become *apostles*, those who are sent out.

Back to the parable. The master called the servants/slaves “good and faithful/good and trustworthy.” They weren't waiting passively for their master to return. To be *good and faithful* means being actively responsible, taking some initiative, even taking some *risk*. From this parable, it would seem God doesn't want us to keep the gifts for ourselves, but to live our lives planting seeds of faith, lighting candles to shine in the darkness—*investing* what we've received so it grows abundantly.

If we try to *protect* this treasure, the good news of God in Christ, to save it only for ourselves, we risk losing it—like the third servant who simply buried his talent and then had it taken away.

Whether you understand this parable as a story about the gospel and faith we've been given, or about stewardship of money, or about wise use of other gifts and talents we have—whatever meaning you get from it, it's clear that ***what we have is to be shared with others for the glory of God and the growth of the kingdom.***

What will you do with your gifts while you wait for Jesus to return?

The good news is this: Think of Jesus as the third servant, the one who had everything taken away from him, the one who was truly *cast out* to die in agony and shame on a cross outside the city walls.

Or think of Jesus in this way: he is the treasure buried in the ground, raised to new life to prepare the way for you on the last day.

Thanks be to God!