

Twenty-Fifth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A): “God Says, ‘Be My Partner!’”
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:14-30
November 18-19, 2023
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

We have yet **another** parable this weekend, as we march through the 25th chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel, which will culminate in the parable of the sheep and goats **next** week, when we celebrate Christ the King, the final weekend of this church year. Last week we heard the kinda shocking parable of the ten wise and silly maidens waiting with their more or less oil-filled lamps for the bridegroom, and this weekend we have the parable of the talents, which also has some shock value.

Our word “talent” (a gift we’re born with, innate aptitude) comes from this story that Jesus told. In this parable, though, “talent” actually means a **large** unit of **money**: about 20 years’ worth of salary for a common laborer, nothing to sneeze at. **Most** of you have heard this parable before, and **some** of you have heard it **many** times before. But Scripture is like classic literature or artwork. Every time we return to it, the Holy Spirit invites us to dig deeper for more treasure. The mine is never emptied; we never exit empty-handed. Each time we visit Scripture, we’ve had more life experiences. Today I’m looking at this story through a different lens than the last time I read it. We can count on the Holy Spirit to open new doors of understanding each time we encounter, wrestle with, dwell in, the Word. It is the Gift that keeps giving!

So this time ‘round, what detail of the parable of the talents grabs you, speaks to you, challenges you, confuses you or inspires you??

Here’s some of my take-away from our lectionary Bible study with St. Denis friends this past Wednesday.

- I found the accusation of the 3rd servant jarring:

“Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed....” (Matt. 25:24)

I can't help but think that makes the master sound dishonest! And if the master represents the Lord in some way, that's troubling, to say the least. So I'd like to think the 3rd servant has a **false impression** of the master, as we sometimes do of folks. I certainly am guilty at times of misjudging **people**, coming to false conclusions, having to ask the Lord's forgiveness for mishandling a situation because I acted on my incorrect assumptions rather than the reality of the situation. Sometimes I misjudge **God**. I conclude, “God will never forgive **this**,” letting my catastrophic thinking overshadow my **confidence**, my **holy trust**, built on past experience, that my Lord is readier to **forgive** than I am to **ask** forgiveness. Or I misjudge God by thinking, “This prayer isn't going anywhere,” because I don't **really** think God will be willing to give what I'm asking. Then the Holy Spirit reminds me that God has more to give than I can even imagine. So from this perspective the 3rd servant was paralyzed by **fear** which wasn't even rooted in reality. It's not just that he was a **conservative** rather than a moderate or aggressive investor. He was the guy who hid his money under the mattress or in a coffee can buried in the backyard.

There's a stewardship message here, for sure. I say that not only because our estimates of giving are due, so Finance has some idea of projected income to support ministries in 2024! The Lord literally gives each one of us **talents**. They differ. Thank Heaven. Because, as St. Paul said, how would the body function if it were all eye? Or ear? If the body had one part instead of many, it wouldn't **be** a body at all. Hopefully each of you is aware of at least a **couple** of the talents God has given you. Whatever those talents are, God

has gifted you with them for a holy reason. God has a plan. Put us all together with our various gifts, and we have everything we need to do whatever God is asking of us on our watch together. We're each a living piece of the puzzle. Each of us is part of a bigger picture. It's more glaringly obvious what we're missing if there is no pastor, or no musician, or no singers, servers or ushers. But believe me when I tell you **your** presence in the pew or the choir loft or the assistant's bench, even your presence **on-line** if you can't be here in person, makes a huge difference, too. **God knows you make a difference.** Each individual expands our voice of praise. Each spiritual or monetary "gift given" is added to a whole which is more than the sum of its parts.

In the Gospel we heard the master say to the first and second servant:

"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."
(Matthew 25:21, 23)

We hear *enter "into the joy of your master"* and we think, "Welcome to Heaven!" And that's not wrong, since this whole set of parables is about the endtimes, our Lord's eventual return, the eternal consequences of our earthly actions. But here's another possible angle from *The Message* paraphrase, in which the master says to the first and second servant:

"Good work! You did your job well! From now on be my partner."

What a great reminder that our "job" is to "partner" with God in the coming of the Kingdom. Like a parent who assigns a child the task of making chocolate chip cookies, providing all the ingredients, all the baking equipment, an oven and hotpads so the child will succeed, God assigns each of us tasks and provides everything we need to succeed. **God doesn't ask the impossible of us.** Remember what the archangel Gabriel says to Mary when she wonders

how a virgin can have a child? ***“Nothing will be impossible with God.”*** (Luke 1:37) God is able when we are willing.

Simply put, God expects a return on the divine investment of talents we’ve received. The Lord calls us to invest our talents, our time, our treasure, in our faith family and in our community. We have folks here who share the spiritual gifts of administration on Council, teaching in Sunday School, mercy on Social Ministry, music up in the choir loft and at the handbell tables, a spirit of service, physical strength, knowledge of the trades on Property, financial acumen and numbers know-how on the Finance team, faith on Stewardship, website and livestream skills on the Tech team, hospitality on Evangelism, intercession in our Intercessory Prayer group, advocacy on Justice & Peace. What God desires, God enables. Our part is to cooperate faithfully and participate wholeheartedly in God’s plan. May the Holy Spirit give us wisdom to recognize our talents, generosity in sharing them, courage to boldly invest ourselves in whatever Kingdom work the Lord graciously invites us to. Then when our lives are over and our work is done, we can hope to hear the Master say:

“Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy,,, enter into the joy of your master.”

Amen.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham