

## “Taking the Risk with God”

Text: Judges 4:1-7

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11 (Series A. 24 Sunday after Pentecost) Ps.123

Matthew 25:14-30

Prayer:

This week’s Gospel is one that is not the most uplifting when it falls on what is generally known in the Church as *Stewardship Sunday*. God obviously has no need of the products of our busy activity since God could give himself everything without us. The only thing that concerns God, the only thing God desires intensely, is our faithful use of our freedom.

In simple terms: the things that are given to us on earth are given to us purely as an exercise, a blank sheet on which we make our own mind and heart. We are on a testing ground.

The whole question is whether you and I have learned how *to obey* and how *to love*. The parable of the talents is a parable about the manner in which God will judge the world and his people. It is a straightforward account.

A man who is about to leave on a journey entrusts his servants with different portions of his property. They are to look after that property and to ensure that it continues to make a profit while he is away.

Two of the servants double the investment they are entrusted with, and are richly rewarded for doing so; but the third gains nothing from it for his master, all he does is keep what he is given safe - following the custom of the time he buries the money so that no harm might come to it.

What happened? What was entrusted to him is taken from him and given to the servant with the 10 talents - and he is cast off the estate of his master and into the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Gospel of Matthew chapter 25 is about the coming of the master to his rightful estate.

As I said - it is a straightforward account this parable of the talents this parable of the three servants who each were entrusted with fabulous capital by their master, - a straightforward account of how God judges the world.

So, what should we make of it? Well - I think we need to consider ourselves to be one of the servants in the parable. Or perhaps even as a fourth servant in this parable.

We need to consider *ourselves* - and our *family* - and our *church* as a servant entrusted with fabulous wealth - wealth to look after - while our master goes on a long journey. We need to consider ourselves as having been given one or two, or three, our four, or five or maybe even ten talents and being left - to do with what we will.

What will we do? I ask that because that is what God has done. God has given each one of us a fabulous treasure - each in a different but abundant measure, and left, what we do with it is up to us. God has gifted you. God has gifted me.

God has gifted this church. So where are we at with it? Are we going to play it safe? And it put it in the bank? Like the third servant did? Or are we going to risk it? Like the first and second servants did?

Just think about it..... Think about *what* God has entrusted to us. Think about *who* God has entrusted to us..... Think about what we have been given in this *life* by our God. What we have been entrusted with for few years here on earth and what we have been promised will be ours for the life to come.

- with the giving of our breath, with each meal we can eat,
- with each person we come into contact with, - with each sight we can see.

I don't think that most of us think about enough. If we did - things would be different, wouldn't they? Different for us. Different for our world. Someone rewrote the Parable of the Talents to try to get at this point, it goes like this:

One there was a king who had three sons, each with a special talent. The first had a talent for *growing fruit*. The second for *raising sheep*. And the third for playing the *violin*. Once, the king had to go overseas on important business. Before departing he called his three sons together and told them he was depending on them to keep the people contented and safe in his absence.

Now for a while, things went well. But then came the winter, a bitter and cruel winter it was. There was a severe shortage of firewood. Thus, the **first son** was faced with a very difficult decision. Should he allow the people to cut down some of his beloved fruit trees for firewood? When he saw the people shivering with cold, he finally allowed them to do so.

The **second son** was also faced with a difficult decision. Food became very scarce. Should he allow the people to kill some of his beloved sheep for food? When he saw the children crying for hunger, his heart went out to them and he allowed them to kill some of the sheep.

Thus, the people had firewood for their fires, and food for their tables. Nevertheless, the harsh winter continued to oppress them. Their spirits began to sag, and there was no one to cheer them up. They turned to **the fiddler**, but he refused to play for them. In the end things got so bad that in desperation many of them emigrated to another to country.

Then one day the king arrived back home. He was terribly sad to find that many of his people had left his kingdom. He called in his three sons to give an account of what had gone wrong.

The first said, "Father, I hope you won't be mad at me, but the winter was very cold and so I allowed the people to cut down some of the fruit trees for firewood." And the second son said, "Father, I hope you won't be mad with me because when food got scarce, I allowed the people to kill some of my sheep." On hearing this, far from being upset, the father embraced his two sons, and told them that he was proud of them.

Then the third son came forward carrying his fiddle with him. "Father", he said, "I refused to play because you weren't here to enjoy my music." "Well then", said the king, "play me a tune now because my heart is full of sorrow." The son raised the violin and bow, but found that his fingers had gone stiff from lack of exercise. No matter how hard he tried, he could not get them to move.

Then the father said, "You could have cheered up the people with your music, but you refused. If the kingdom is half-empty, the fault is yours. But now you can no longer play. That will be your punishment."

We know the problem with the third servant, don't we? His problem was his fear. He either feared too much - or not enough. And so, he was very, very careful of all that the master gave him.

- Like the man who is afraid to love - because he might get hurt
- Like the woman who is afraid to reach out - because she might be rejected
- Like the child who is afraid to walk - because he might fall down, the third servant was afraid; and as in the case of all most fears, his fear came true - what he had was not enough for his master.

The third servant was afraid. He was afraid even though the constant message of God's presence - is - "*be not afraid*". *Be not afraid. But trust God*. Trust in the one who said "*they who seek to save their lives will lose them, but they who give their lives for me and for the gospel, will save them.*" Trust in the one who gave himself on the cross - and who in doing so made an end of death.

The parable of the talents is **not** a lesson about our degree of *ability* or *productivity*. It is a lesson about our *attitude* and our *responsibility*:

- it is about stepping out with God's treasure in our hands and risking it all for the sake of God.
- it is about really daring to love - really daring to care even though a thousand and one bad things might happen.

The sin of the third servant, is the sin of not daring to risk - the sin of not believing that God will reward all who trust in him, the sin of not trusting the one who gave his life for us to raise us up when we give our lives for him.

What I have accepted is that this is a forewarning that we have each been given the gifts / talents that we need to fulfill our purpose in this earthly sojourn. Jesus has laid it out clearly that the *Lord will come like a thief in the night* in the midst of seeming *peace and security*.

This life is filled with risky investments of time, of relationships, of errors in judgement. Yet we must continue to endeavor to discover and recognize our gifts, our opportunities, and the path that draws us to salvation. We must risk now to be saved later.

The mystery of the Gospel is not entrusted to the Church to be buried in the ground. It is given to the Church in order to be risked in the change and interchange of the spiritual commerce of humanity.

Be not afraid – be not afraid.

- if we invested ourselves as much as we are able too, in God's work
- if we use the gifts of God for the glory of God,

God will be pleased with us - and we will enter into *his joy* we will sit down and eat with the groom and we will abide in the blessedness saved up for all who trust and believe, both now - and forevermore. **Amen.**

November 19, 2023