

Worship Service Resources - "A Rough Ride"

5th Sunday in Lent, Year C,

3rd April, 2022

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18 NIV / Luke 19:11-27 NIV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video) [Fearless](#) dc Talk

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Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn – *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* 37

Call to Worship

One: Sing the new day

All: O God, we come.

One: Sing a new Song

All: Awakened, we come.

One: Sing to the light

All: So beckoned, we come.

Invocation

O God, There is a richness here –

a richness that greets and grows and holds and challenges and keeps.

There is a richness here –

a richness that surrounds and brings and delivers and gives.

The richness holds us in our weakness,

fills us in our hunger,

finds us when we're lost.

So here, richly blessed, we have come, and we have been found.

Let this time together inspire us in richness and grace. Amen.

Word of the Prophet - Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18 NIV

Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.'

Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. Though they build houses, they will not live in them; though they plant vineyards, they will not drink the wine."

The great day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.

That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness—

a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers.

"I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung.

Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath." In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.

Hymn

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

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Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer (Resources)

Lord God - we give you thanks for all your gifts to us – for daily food - for health - for each breath we take - for freedom to choose - and for the gifts of your word, your power, and your love. Our hearts are truly overwhelmed, O God, when we consider all that you are and how you have entrusted so much to us. May we be worthy of that trust - may we be a people who are unafraid to live as fully and as richly as you want us to live.

Help us O God, as followers of Jesus, to multiply all that you given us, to risk spreading your word and perhaps see it misunderstood, to gamble by loving those whom others think worthy only of hate, to take chances by doing good to those who have not done good to us. Help us be faith filled and to desire to increase your glory and your goodness in this world. Make us ones who share in both word and deed that which you have given to us.

We pray, O God, for the church here today - that it may encourage all its members to discover, develop, and use all their gifts, those of nature and those of grace.

We pray for those who are poor in body or in spirit... for those who are oppressed and heavy laden.... for those who are sick or in despair... Minister O God by your Spirit, and by us, to all those for whom we have prayed - and help us walk faithfully in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ - he who taught us to pray together as one family, saying.

Ending with:

**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 trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.**

Gospel Lesson Luke 19:11-27 NIV

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.

He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.

So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

"But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

"He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.'

"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

"The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.'

“His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth.

I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’

“His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow?

Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’

“Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’

“‘Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’

“He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me.’”

Message – “*A Rough Ride*”

So how many of us have ever had to make a choice whether to engage in something that has some risk involved? It could be taking a risk financially, or maybe taking a leap of faith in taking a chance on a big career move? How did you make that decision? Did you weigh the pros and cons, and choose the path that seemed like the safest bet? Or did you go out on a limb and decide to “go big or go home?”

Some of us are more comfortable with risk than others. Some are more driven to seek higher levels of success in our endeavors and are willing to take those risks than others. They are often those who we think of as “entrepreneurs,” those who exude confidence and always seem sure of themselves. Others are more cautious, and only make calculated decisions, seeking to preserve what they have achieved, and are content with smaller, safer gains in life.

Often we see this difference between the young and the old. Young adults are often more likely to be willing to take risks. They have less to lose after all, they haven't acquired much, just starting out in their adult lives. Plus they don't have the baggage of all that accumulated wisdom that comes with age, they haven't failed much to learn from their mistakes. Meanwhile, those who are older have been down many roads, and have made many poor decisions, and have learned from them. They often have achieved some measure of security that is more difficult to risk losing. Making risky decisions is the focus of this week's parable as we continue our Lenten journey with Jesus.

As we catch up with Jesus this week, he has just had his encounter with Zaccheus in Jericho. Zaccheus was the chief tax collector in Jericho, which implies that he made his living cheating and defrauding people in order to line his own profits. Tax collectors made their money by collecting the taxes due to Rome, but the only way they got anything for themselves was to find ways to get more money than what was owed by those in their jurisdiction. Yet upon meeting Jesus, Zaccheus had such a powerful conversion experience that he offered to pay back all he defrauded four times what he originally cheated them out of, an act of contrition unheard of by a man like himself. That encounter sets the stage for this parable, that Jesus gives just before he is to enter Jerusalem.

This is an unsettling parable, one in which a nobleman has entrusted ten of his slaves with a mina, which some bibles translate as a pound. Whatever the term, the amount equals about three month's wages. The first two slaves have taken the mina, risked investing it, and made more money, but the last one did not do anything but safely hide away his mina, afraid of possibly losing it, and afraid of this "harsh" master who reaped where he did not sow. The parable has a rather harsh ending, for those who did not want the nobleman to be king, are slaughtered in his presence.

Our initial tendency would be to try to somehow see a connection between God or Jesus and this cruel ruler in the story, since Luke introduces the parable as being told due to people's expectations that the kingdom of God would be arriving immediately upon Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. But that is a very vexing analogy to make, and it is rife with problems. How can we justify the greed and the lack of scruples in how he conducts business and deals with others? Is this the actions of a just ruler? Not at all.

It makes much more sense then, to take a look at the slaves whom he has entrusted some of his wealth, as well as the audience who would have been traveling with Jesus on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. They were not likely the upper crust of society, more likely they would be on the lower end of the social scale. They would know the value of three months wages. Hearing how the first two servants gambled and risked losing fully one quarter of what you'd earn in a whole year would I'm sure draw disapproving frowns and reactions from the crowd. But the character who held onto his mina and kept it safe, now there is a sober, sensible fellow they would have thought. He will not be going hungry. His family will be fed. Yet can you imagine the surprised reactions when they hear his fate?

How different are our reactions to this scenario? I'm sure many of us can identify with being frugal, with scrimping and saving, and not taking unnecessary risks. Yet, is this really a parable about savvy stewardship either? Certainly coming on the heels of the Zaccheus story, money would be on their minds, but I don't think that was what Jesus had in mind either. If we remember the start of our story, Jesus tells this parable because people "thought the kin-dom of God was going to appear at once." Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem. They were expecting a warrior-king messiah who would vanquish their enemies and overlords and resolve all the problems of their world. Someone who would fit the mold that they made for what the messiah should be, and how God should fit into their

expectations and solve all their problems for them. If they were the ones telling this parable, the ruler would return and praise the solitary slave who kept the one mina safe, who followed tradition and common sense and practice and hid the money in the cellar rather than take any risk.

But that's not the way of God works, is it? God doesn't fit into boxes we make for the divine. Seeing how this takes place right after staying with Zacchaeus, a tax collector, Jesus seems to be indicating that God is reaping wherever religious folks have assumed God is not present. God is with the outcasts. God is with those we forget to think about or don't want to think about.

Jesus is reminding his followers of something that he's been saying and preaching about all along. Being his disciple is all about risk and sacrifice. We are to pick up our crosses and follow him daily. And if we aren't willing to risk our reputations and our routines, we are bound to lose. If we hold on to what we have to save ourselves, we will lose it all.

I'd like to share a little poem on risk that was found on a classroom wall: To laugh is to risk appearing the fool, To weep is to risk appearing sentimental, To reach out for another is to risk involvement, To expose feelings is to risk exposing, your true self, To place your ideas, your dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss, To love is to risk not being loved in return, To live is to risk dying, To hope is to risk despair, To try is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing. The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing and is nothing. They may avoid suffering and sorrow but they cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love or live. Charmed by their attitudes they are a slave, they have forfeited their freedom. Only a person who risks is free. When we take risks for God we do so in obedience to God's leading, as well as Christ's teaching.

The writer of Hebrews tells us in chapter 11 that we will walk by faith and not by sight and seek to follow the example of the great heroes of the faith. The truth is each of us here today can do the same for our God and the people around you in this very community. You just have to be willing to take the risk, accept the mission, get out of your comfort zone and really serve God through the adventure that we call faith.

We worry and fret about the size of our congregation and the state of Christianity today, but what risks are we willing to take? How much are we like the slave who hid his mina in the cellar, wrapped in cloth? I think we all have a mina we cling to for the safety and security we think it provides. Maybe it's tradition, the way we've always done things. After all, why should we risk change that makes us uncomfortable, change that doesn't make sense to us? Maybe it's the comfort of the familiar. We like our routines, our way of being together. It works for us so why should we change? Maybe it's our dogma, how we've always understood scripture, and our conception of what's right and wrong that we perceive as drawn from that scripture. Why risk looking at scripture any differently or being open to different ways of living and being that are unfamiliar to what we've always thought of as the biblical norm.

Jesus is telling us today in our story that being his disciple, his follower, is choosing a life of risk. He knows what is coming up when he enters Jerusalem. He knows the risk he is taking. He also knows what is coming up for his disciples as well, the risk they are taking. He knows the risk the future church will be facing. The persecution of the early church, but also the struggles of the current church.

Today's parable teaches us if we aren't willing to risk our reputations and our routines, we are bound to lose. If we hold on to what we have to save ourselves, we will lose it all. What are we willing to risk and let go of in order to reach those on the margins, those outside of our fold who need Jesus the most? But most importantly, what are you yourself willing to risk? For the cost of comfortable complacency may be bigger than you may realize, as our servant found out in our story today. May we be willing to take the risks we are called to as followers of the risen Christ, whose entire life was risked and spent for our behalf. Amen.

A Call to Serve

Beloved, there will always be need in the world, and the church is called respond to this need. Let us give of ourselves – share what we have – not just from the abundance that has been given to us, but from the devotion and dedication inspired in us by the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

What we own is nothing, Valuable God – what we can gain or keep or have is Worthless if it is only for our own satisfaction. All that we have and all that we are belongs to you, and the giving is a blessing in itself. We dedicate this day, not only the things we can put in a plate or write on a piece of paper, but also the things we cannot touch: our hearts, our spirits, our passion, our resolve. Use them, and us, to restore the fortunes of all your People: to seek your will, to strengthen your church, and to serve you faithfully. Amen.

Hymn – *For Christ and the Church* 416

Benediction

You can heal, Christ has touched you. You can love, Christ has sought you. You can give yourself away. Christ has come walking and called you. You can break the barriers that keep you from your calling. Christ has visited your house. Christ is in you and around you. Christ will set you free.

Postlude