

Worship Service “Running Scared??”

25th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 19th November, 2023

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 NSRV / Matthew 25:14-30 NSRV

Prelude (video) [*How Shall I Sing To God*](#)
Posted to YouTube by Annie Center

Opening Music(video) [*I Have This Hope*](#) Tenth Ave North
Written by Jason Ingram, Jeff Owen, Mike Donehey, CCLI SONG #7071188,
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Welcome / Announcements

Pass the Peace (video) [*I Will Change Your Name*](#)
Posted to YouTube by Annie Center

Opening Hymn (video) [*We Gather Together*](#) **17**
Posted to Youtube by Antipolo United Methodist Church, Inc.

Call to Worship

 (responsive)

One: Great and Glorious God, we gather to worship you.
We lift our eyes to you, in reverent awe before your majesty.

All: Great is the Lord our God, and greatly to be praised!

One: Generous and Merciful God, we come to worship you.
We lift our eyes to you, giving thanks for your compassion.

All: Gracious is the Lord our God, and greatly to be praised!

One: Welcoming and Empowering God, we worship you.
We lift our eyes to you, and we celebrate your faithfulness.

All: Holy is the Lord our God, and greatly to be praised!
We lift our eyes, seeking to worship and praise our God. Amen.

Invocation - Reveal Yourself

“As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master . . . so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us.” Psalm 123:2

Lord of heaven and earth of all nations and peoples all faiths and no faith reveal yourself to those who are suffering, reveal yourself to all who are refugees, reveal yourself to those who are powerful, reveal yourself to all who are powerless, reveal yourself to ordinary people in their everyday lives, that this world might reflect your love and your glory.

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Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 NSRV

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you.

For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief;

for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober;

for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night.

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

A Time of Prayer

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Our gracious eternal God, the ancient words of Paul echo in our souls this day. We are so much like the people of the Thessalonian Church and its culture.

We want to have glimpses of the future so that we might know that we are secure.

We want to have the security to know that tomorrow will be alright.

We want to have life all buttoned down and figured out so there will be no surprises.

We want you to rid us of all anxiety and worry and fear.

We want to know that when the great call comes for us we will be safe.

We want all darkness and all uncertainty removed from our lives.

Become alive for us again in these quiet moments. We pray that in this teachable moment you would again open to us your powerful and grace-filled presence.

Lead our spirits to find the courage to say, "All will be well because we are yours."

Lead our spirits to find the ability to live one moment and one day at a time.

Lead our spirits to serenity and a peace which the world cannot give.

Lead our spirits to know that with your power we can cope with whatever surprises life presents to us.

Lead our spirits to know that we are destined "not for wrath" but for your redeeming.

And lead our spirits to know that "whether we wake or sleep," living or dying, we are yours into the ages of all ages. Amen.

— Richard J Einerson, posted on Richard J. Einerson: Prayers of the People.

<http://www.richardeinerson.com/november-19-2023.html>

Hymn (video) [***Blessed Assurance***](#) **332**

Written by Fanny Jane Crosby and Phoebe Palmer Knapp

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Gospel Reading - Matthew 25:14-30 NRSV

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.

To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more.

So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.

But the man who had received one bag 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 five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five 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 your master's happiness!'

"The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; 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 your master's happiness!'

"Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

"So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags.

For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance.
Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there
will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Message - *Rev. Glenn Brumbaugh*

This parable has often been called the "Parable of the Talents" as one term for the gold used is that of a talent. Now we can certainly make use of the play on the English term talent to look at our strengths, etc. It also brings to mind a story. A guy came to his pastor and said, "Reverend, I only have one talent." The pastor asked, "What's your talent? The man said, "I have the gift of criticism." The pastor was wise and replied, "The Bible says that the guy who had only one talent went out and buried it. Maybe that's what you ought to do with yours."

But getting back to the biblical use of the term talent, this measurement was roughly equivalent to 75 pounds of gold. Quite valuable to be sure, even by ancient standards. So from the outset, this lesson is starting out with some pretty fantastic parameters in terms of the wealth entrusted to these servants. And that's just one of several problematic elements of this parable. Too often, we try to make the parables of Jesus into cut and dry moral lessons, almost like fairy tales, from which we can get a simple lesson without digging too deep into the elements of the story. Sadly, we can often miss the real tension Jesus is trying to highlight. The temptation with this story would be to make the rich landowner an allegory for God, but let's give that some further thought. First of all, the servant who is punished, as well as the landowner himself, acknowledges that he reaps where he does not sow, that he is a harsh man. The landowner also praises the risk-taking accumulation of wealth and punishes one for being frugal and cautious.

So as is often the case with parables, we can't just come up with a cut and dry interpretation. So if the landowner isn't God, what lessons can we get out of this somewhat troubling account? Well, first and foremost, one thing that stands out to me is the fear evident in the servant who only received one talent. He is afraid of the potential cruelty of his master, based on his unscrupulous reputation. And that fear appears to ultimately be justified; in the rather severe punishment he receives for his inaction. Again, this makes identifying the landowner with the Almighty difficult and troubling.

If God is the landowner and we are the servants, that would imply that our motivation to be fruitful and to act decisively is to be based on fear. Fear of God,

fear of what will happen to us if we don't make the right decisions. But is that really what our faith is to be about, and is that really what God is about?

Certainly fear has been used by religion as a tool throughout Christian history. The greater Church has a long track record of claiming to have the proverbial keys to the kingdom, controlling who gets in and who gets out. Do this and don't do this, or you will spend eternity in pain and suffering. Or portrayals of God as an angry and wrathful deity who almost delights in judgment and punishment.

I'm reminded of the imagery used by the renowned Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards in one of his sermons to describe one vision of our relationship with God. He states, "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked. His wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire. He is of purer eyes than to bear you in his sight; you are ten thousand times as abominable in his eyes as the most hateful, venomous serpent is in ours." Powerful imagery and what a portrayal of the God we worship.

Is that the kind of God you imagine? Is that the kind of God Jesus generally portrays? I certainly hope and think not. Yet how often have we heard that kind of fear used to try to either scare believers into compliance, or worse yet, to convert nonbelievers. I don't know about you but that's not a club I'd be in a hurry to join. Likewise, how is fear used in other ways in our culture? We are encouraged to fear those who are different from us, to make others the root of our problems. If we place the blame on the "other," then those who are really responsible for solving our problems escape scrutiny. Now, to be sure, Jesus does use some familiar fearful imagery to end this parable, being cast out where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, to be banished to the wilderness full of wild beasts.

But do we really think it's because we respond with cautious fear, or is something else the focus of this story? Clearly the other two servants are being praised for their actions, for their initiative in taking risks and growing the master's wealth. Is Jesus praising their venture capital approach to finance? Is he promoting playing the market, gambling on a bull market? If we recall that Jesus also said that it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven, I doubt that's what he's getting at here. So if it's not wealth or material success, what is it that makes the two servants more laudable than the third? Could it be simply the willingness to brave any action at all? The only difference between the first two and the last servant is that they were willing to step outside of what was safe and secure and take the risk of acting.

I talked a couple of weeks ago about the bubbles and boxes we tend to build around ourselves, and this certainly speaks to that idea. But I think it's more reflective of our overall faith and commitment. Do we have fire in our bellies to be active disciples, to take action, to be vibrant in our faith. Or has our faith gone cold? Do we make the trek to church every Sunday, sit through worship and just maintain a minimal faith and presence as a Christian? Or are we somewhere in the middle? Hot and cold, depending on what we feel like doing and how much we want to participate on any given day? Kinda lukewarm faith.

I would argue that there is ample evidence to support the view that it's this kind of faith that is the core of the message in this particular parable. John of Patmos, when writing to the church in Laodicea in Revelation remarks, "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither cold or hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth." In Dantes Inferno, he goes a step further. Those souls who led lukewarm faiths are imprisoned in Hell's vestibule, where they are caught in a rushing, whirling wind chasing a banner that never "takes a stand," also being forever stung by hornets and wasps that circled them. However, I'll leave the metaphors off at that, lest I be accused of fearful imagery to try to scare you into compliance.

But the message is clear. To take the easy road, to be lukewarm, never to take a stand, really is not to live the life of faith we are called to. The one who buries their treasure will never gain anything. The one who is neither hot nor cold really has no temperature at all. And again, let's not also make the mistake of viewing this parable as a way to use fear to make us be more active believers. But instead, let's return to the gifts that were given to the servants at the beginning of the story. These treasures, or talents, were incredible gifts in their size and value. Even just one of these talents was worth a lifetime of wages to these servants in this story. Likewise so are the gifts we are given as disciples of Christ.

The Gospel alone, the promise and hope of the resurrection, are gifts beyond measure. Add grace to the mix and there is no limit to the generosity we are afforded. The question is, what do we do with the gifts we've been given? Do we actively share the gospel with others? Do we show the same grace with others we've been given? And to make use of the play on words with talent in this passage, what do we do with the talents we've been given? Do we take the risk of sharing and increasing those gifts, or do we hoard and bury them?

I'd like to close today with a story about two brothers. Once upon a time, a mother gave each of her sons two dollars and took them to a toy store to buy the beautiful, shiny marbles they had been asking for. The older son quickly figured

out how many marbles he could get with his two dollars, chose the biggest and best of them all, and brought them to the counter in a brown paper bag. He was very happy. Now, the younger son, who loved the marbles just as much as his brother, realized he needed a strong bag to carry them around in so he could play marbles with his friends. After choosing a sturdy little drawstring bag, he could buy only half as many marbles as his brother, but he was happy too. The older brother thought so much of his small treasure that he would never let anyone else play with those shiny marbles—in fact; he wouldn't even play with them himself. He would only look at them adoringly in the privacy of his own bedroom. Whenever he went anyplace, he gathered them up in the brown paper bag and clutched it to his side to be sure no one would get them. The younger brother, on the other hand, went to the park every day and played marbles with his friends for hours and hours.

At first, he lost many of his precious marbles to his friends, but he soon became good at the game and won back more than he lost—filling up his sturdy little drawstring bag. One day, as the younger brother walked to the park, he found a beautiful marble on the sidewalk. He found another a few feet later, and another. He found marble after marble all the way to the park. He couldn't fit all the new marbles into his bag, so he handed them out to some kids who didn't have any and invited them to play marbles too. They had more fun that afternoon than any other day so far. When the younger brother returned home for dinner, the older brother was in the kitchen staring mournfully at his brown paper bag— which was empty, with a hole in the bottom. Do you try to safeguard and protect your marbles, or do you take the risk in sharing them with others. Are you warm in your faith, or lukewarm. The message here is that lukewarm is not the happy way to go. That way leads to the wilderness, to being away from the presence we are called to follow. Only the active, vibrant faith leads to the greater reward.

My hope and prayer is that we seek to live active lives of faith and sharing the gifts we've been given, so that others may also find a way out of the cold and lukewarm, into a warm existence in the presence that never fades or goes cold. Amen.

Call to Serve

God, whose giving knows no ending, we offer up the treasure that you have entrusted to us; we offer up the skills and time that you have graciously given to us; we offer up ourselves in service and praise. Receive these gifts

by your grace. Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. Amen.

~ written by Joanna Harader, and posted on the **Spacious Faith** blog. <http://spaciousfaith.com/>

A Time for Reflection (Video) [*At The Deer*](#)

Posted to Youtube by Annie Center

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We give you all thanks and praise, O God, for you have destined us for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You created the earth and entrusted it into our hands. You called a people to be your own, and when they were cruelly oppressed you raised up your prophet, Deborah, and spoke through her of the day of deliverance.

You have spoken to us through your child, Jesus, teaching us to look to you and trust in your kindness, and to be faithful stewards of your gifts. He was scorned and mocked and died for us, but was raised by you. You have promised a day of judgment and deliverance, when Christ will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night, to reveal the children of light and gather all who have been trustworthy with what you have given into his kingdom of joy.

Therefore, with our hearts lifted high, we offer you thanks and praise at all times through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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Hymn (video) [*Open My Eyes, That I May See*](#) **517**

Written by Clara H. Fiske Scott

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Benediction

Go now, and live as children of the light. Put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. Make the most of all God has given you and encourage one another in Christ.

And may God's hand be open to you in kindness; May Christ Jesus welcome you into his joy; And may the Holy Spirit fill you with courage, vigilance and faithfulness. We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

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Postlude (Video)

[Praise The Lord by W.A. Mozart](#)

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