

Proper 28 Year A 2020
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
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Judges 4:1-7 Psalm 123 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Matthew 25:14-30

The Temple, the center of religious life – all of life, really, lies in ruins. Jesus, who said he would come back, is nowhere to be found. The gospel writer Matthew wants his readers to know about the Good News of Jesus Christ, how following Jesus will bring us an abundance of life no matter what we have, and that life under Roman rule will not run our lives. Ultimate control of our lives belongs to Jesus the Christ. It is from this context that Matthew writes Jesus' parable.

A biblical talent is a 75 pound piece of gold that was worth as much as 20 years' worth of wages – that 15-20 years' worth of wages!

A landowner goes away, leaving these gold bars to his slaves to manage.

None of them loses the money. Two increase the gold by 100%. The one buries the gold, which is fully in line with Jewish law and customs of the day, to bury money so as not to lose it. If this parable is about money, then the parable is a terrible and accurate indictment of the world. This is a world in which the rich get richer through usury (getting and charging interest), and the poor stay poor and are, in fact, thrown into hell. "You wicked and lazy servant!"

The third slave is a truth-teller. I really like him for that.

"You!" he says to the landowner: you have achieved your wealth at the expense of others—by "reaping where [he] did not sow, and scattering where [he] did not scatter seed." The first two servants multiply the rich man's dishonesty. The third refuses to participate in this system of oppression, an act for which he is abandoned and condemned to a place of suffering.

The Kingdom of heaven *as we know it from Matthew* is not a kingdom in which God is absent. If God is the landowner and we are the slaves,

Then this parable is not about God's kingdom at all This is not the message of the Matthean Jesus, the Jesus who says "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." These parabolic actions are not the actions of God made known in Christ.

Let's reassess this parable. Paul's words to the people of Thessalonica are helpful: For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.... For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, *as indeed you are doing*.

Paul is writing to the Thessalonians, encouraging them and lauding them for being faithful people while they are waiting for the return of the Lord. We remember that piece, that we can look at this parable within the view of a people waiting for the return of Christ ...

How, then, do **w**e live?

We prepare, stay prepared, live as if Christ is not only coming but is already with us ... and we build one another up in faith.

And that the gold God gives us

Is indeed that which we have not earned,

That we have always been a people who reaped what we did not sow,

And grew what we have not planted...

It is God who keeps promises – “I am with you until the end of the age”

By staying with us, in loving us when we have not been loveable, when we treated Jesus like the third slave, and hated him and abandoned him and left him to die. God gave us *and still gives us* the best gold bar that there is, and that is our faith in Jesus Christ.

When we are caretaking our faith in Christ there is no use in burying it.

We are to fling our faith far and wide, (figuratively) doubling the gifts that we have been given – which is everything that we have. Our “natural” abilities come from God, who multiplies them beyond measure.

What if we lived so fully into our faith that we forgot to be afraid (of whatever)? That is how we wait for the Lord, who even now is with us until the end of time.

Thomas Long (*Matthew*, Westminster Bible Companion) writes that:

The parable is not a gentle tale about what Christians do with their individual gifts and talents, as helpful as that may be, but a disturbing story about what Christians

do or do not do with the *gospel* as they wait for the coming of the kingdom of heaven [p. 281, emphasis in original].

The parable is disturbing and convicting when we think about what we as a community are doing with the generous gift of the gospel while waiting for Jesus to return. God asks us to act out of faith, not fear, in every time of the world. Even then, we are giving to do only that which we actually can do, which might include:

- Building an ark and collecting all the animals of the earth, as Noah did;
- Leaving home – going into a wilderness, physical, temporal, or spiritual, as Abraham did;
- Leaving our path in order to stand on holy ground, as Moses did;
- Listening to God through angels as did so many: Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph;
- Getting thrown off of our convictions and maybe even our horse, as Paul did;
- In order to proclaim the gospel
- As we indeed build up one another while we wait for our Lord ...
- Who is with us even to the end of the age.
- “What will we give,” Jesus asks us (Matt 16), “in return for our lives?”

At this time of the year, right here, in the context of the church, a vestry is called to manage the “budget,” a dollar amount that we have given of ourselves, to envision a parish that uses all of the other gifts that we have in order to share the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, with one another, with the community of Greenville, in our homes and with our families. The Church of the Redeemer has quite a story to tell. From our little hill on the edge of Greenville, neither fire nor pandemic have stopped the love, and of living into the love, of Jesus. I invite every one of us to join in this amazing life of spreading Jesus’ love and way of life. If the safest place for you to be is at home, then stay safe ... and build God’s kingdom. Call one another, parishioners, especially the people you do not know, and get acquainted. Share your faith story, which is the story of your life. How might we **continue** to build one another up in the love of Christ and not in the fear and hatred of the world?

Redeemer will continue to be a light of Christ on this little hill on the edge of Greenville, a center of the love of Christ that allows us to be bold in faith and in ministry. Join in with your gifts: of prayer, of feeding, of pulling weeds, of listening, of washing the linens of Christ, arranging flowers, facilitating worship. In this time of “no spectators,” or at most a very few, join the team on the field. We need you to help shine the light of Christ, who is with us now until the end of the age. Thanks be to God! Alleluia!