

## November 19, 2023 - Pentecost 25

### **Prayer of the Day**

Righteous God, our merciful master, you are the source of the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

### **Gospel Reading - Matthew 25:14-30**

"For [the reign of God] is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, '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.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, '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.'

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "

### **Sermon**

With God, there is always more.

This story from Matthew, this parable which he reports as Jesus' teaching, is a wonderful example of the fact that, with God, there is always more.

The amount of money which the rich man has, and which he gives to his servants, is staggering. There is no actual "exchange rate" which we can use to say what a "talent" would be worth in today's money, but we can easily assume it would be something astronomical, say like ten million dollars. The only way most people are going to see even *one* talent, one chunk of ten million dollars, is if they win a lottery.

And this rich man has such vast holdings that he can give out *eight* talents of his wealth to some of his servants.

And, as you know, the first two take this money and turn it into *more* money. With God, there is always more, right?. And the third, the "wicked and lazy" one, still had ten million dollars to play with! He took this great opportunity, and threw it away. So his money was given to the one

who now had ten. The master had already begun giving the first servant the “more” which had been promised, demonstrating that, with God, there is always more, right?

So, we are left with the conclusion that we are called to *use* our gifts and abilities (which is what the word “talent” has come to mean). And remember, there is no “small” talent, because the talent had a huge value back in the day. Even if you can only do one thing, do it well. Don't hide from the gifts God has given, because with God, there is always more.

So we have been told.

Don't get me wrong! For some people, the message that they do indeed have gifts and abilities, and that their gifts and abilities are valued, is an amazing piece of Good News!

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that we have an innate ability to twist passages like this into impossible pretzels, so they can become nearly unrecognizable.

The understanding of this passage as being exclusively about using our talents to make them grow and accumulate, has gained popularity in certain circles, under the name of the “Prosperity Gospel.” Some preachers, some of them on TV, some of them doing the lecture circuit, are telling their audience, “God wants you to be rich.” One of the things that I have heard them tell young couples is, “God wants you to be ‘GOOD.’ G-O-O-D, which stands for “**Get Out Of Debt.**”

And these Prosperity Gospel preachers harp on such points as, ‘With God, there is always more.’

I stand by what I said. I believe that, with God, there *is* always more. But the challenge with this statement is that, in our society and the economic system we have devised for ourselves, we are likely to think of this “more” in terms of accumulation, in terms of increased income and bank accounts. We assume that the best thing we can do with money is make *more* of it. We are enamoured of the handful of people in the world who have amassed vast personal fortunes, and hold them up as examples to which we should all aspire. And we hear interpretations of the stories from the Bible which seem to back this up, by portraying God as the rich guy in the sky who will give some of his riches to some of his servants... *if* we are “G-O-O-D.”

But I can't help but think that there has to be more going on. I think there is more going on than simply, “Use whatever talents God has given you, and make sure not to bury them.” And I *certainly* think there is more going on than just, “God wants you to be rich”!

So, if “with God, there is always more,” maybe there is a different *kind* of “more” which is being given.

One way to discover this different kind of “more,” is to break loose of the easy assumptions we make when reading these parables.

The biggest assumption we make when reading any of the parables in the Bible, is assuming that the big person in the story must always be God. Sometimes, that's certainly valid. But we don't *have* to read them that way. And there may be something radically new in being intentional about *not* making that assumption.

So maybe the rich guy in this parable is simply a rich guy! He has accumulated vast amounts of wealth, has surrounded himself with the finer things of life, and has a large staff of servants and slaves to look after it for him, especially when he's out travelling the world on business (in order to make *io* of it!).

So, in preparation for his latest trip, he divides some of his wealth among some of his trusted servants, and hits the road.

The first two servants completely buy into the assumptions of their master that “The purpose of wealth is to get more wealth.” So they go and do what their master would do with his money. And when the master returns, he is delighted that they have increased his wealth for him. They have played the game according to his rules, and they have “won.” So, naturally, he gives

them more of the same kind of responsibilities, with the expectation that they will get the same kinds of results.

But the third servant doesn't seem to want to play by those rules. He says he's "afraid." He says he knows how his master has accumulated his wealth, reaping where he did not sow, and gathering where he did not scatter seed. In other words, stealing. And he doesn't accept the assumption that the purpose of money is to make more money. In other words, hoarding.

In this reading of the parable, it could be argued that what he's not really afraid of is his master; he's actually afraid of losing *himself* in the assumptions that everyone else in the story is making, of losing his humanity in the face of an economics of exploitation. So he doesn't even go to the bank and purchase a GIC, because that would still be playing the game.

So he buries the money in a hidden location.

Naturally, the master is none too pleased about this. So he takes the money from the so-called "wicked and lazy servant," gives it to the first, and throws the authentic human being into "the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It's ironic, if you think about it. The rich man can only conceive of life in his bubble. He can only see the wealth and the finer things with which he has surrounded himself, and he can only conclude that any life *outside* of that bubble must be horrendous and unliveable.

But Matthew knew the end of his story. Matthew's *readers* knew the end of the story. *We* know the end of the story.

It is precisely "outside," it is precisely in the "outer darkness," where Jesus is found, or where Jesus finds *us*. It is *outside* the circles of power and wealth where Jesus insists that the reign of God is coming. It is precisely outside the bubbles of safety that we think we have created for ourselves by our economic systems and our exploitation and our hoarding, that is where Jesus is living, and has always lived.

Yes, being cast out of the bubbles of safety frequently results in a cross. But, as we know, that's precisely where we are embraced by our loving Saviour.

The Prosperity Gospel preachers are right! With God, there *is* always more. But the "more" that we are promised, the "more" that we are given, is *not* more stuff, more safety, or more bubbles.

What we are given is more life, more love, more grace, more acceptance, more welcome. Even more ways of understanding old stories.

We can be free of the assumptions which surround us, because with God, there is always more. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

A - Trusting the presence of God with all creation, we offer our prayers for the world God loves, the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

[Short pause]

A - God of more, we have created a system which assumes more stuff, more accumulation, more money, is always good. Free us from our cravings, that we may begin to understand the "more" you actually promise. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of more, with you there is always more - more meaning, more depth, more insight, more love. Raise our awareness, that our awe may increase. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of more, give us the faith to stop admiring hoarding. Give us the love to stop exploiting.  
Give us the hope to embrace a different set of rules, which enable us to *share* your life with our world. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of more, when we look at your church, we are tempted only to see less. Broaden our vision, that we may see your presence far beyond these walls. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of more, we offer our prayers for those who face limitations - limited health, limited resources, limited contact with others, limited hope, especially those we name before you.

*[Long pause]*

Use *us* to touch all who are hurting with your unlimited love and grace. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of more, free us from our addiction to “bigger.” Free us to go deeper into the love you have for all of creation. God who calls us,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.