

Lectionary 33A Proper 28A
November 15, 2020
Grace Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL

Judges 4:1-7
Psalm 123
I Thess 5:1-11
Matt 25:14-30

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading is one that has been understood in a stereotypical and perfunctory way – something like this: take the gifts that God has given you and use them well so that great things come about and so that you don't get cast into hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, certainly we should faithfully use what God has given us to further the kingdom. But there is much more to this little parable. We've spoken before about how reading a parable is a bit like looking through a kaleidoscope and then turning the end of it just a click and an entirely new pattern with new colors appears. I think you will see that this parable that has some preposterous elements and enables to learn more of what Jesus is teaching to his followers.

So, first a little context here. A "talent" here does not mean skill or ability. A talent is a unit of money – a very large unit of money. A talent was equivalent to about 15 year's wages. If we assume that the average income of individuals in the United States is around \$25,000 -- and it is actually higher than that – a talent today would be about \$350,000 and 5 talents would be nearly 2 million dollars! This was one very wealthy master! And one very confident master to entrust over \$3 million to his servants. Preposterous.

And, the slaves who doubled it – preposterous! They should probably patent that investment strategy of theirs.

And what about digging a hole in the ground and putting \$350,000 in it! Preposterous! – in our minds.

But here's what I find so intriguing about this parable. The disciples who heard this would have been aghast at the outcome – aghast because the third servant who was treated so harshly by the master was the one who was actually doing what was acceptable in accordance with what was understood at the time as honorable behavior. This one was safeguarding what had been entrusted to him. And safeguarding it in a way that was expected in those days. Let me say that again – the third servant was doing what was expected.

And, they would also have been aghast because the other two servants who turned such a profit for their master behaved in a most dishonorable fashion by virtue of earning that profit. In those times, the view was that the only way that someone could have a gain, especially one as great as this, was because others had a commensurate loss. There was only so much good to go around and if I get more it's because someone else will have less. An absolute win-lose approach to things.

Preposterous.

So, what does this parable say to us today – to us individually and to us collectively as the community of faith at Grace Lutheran Church? Like the parable of the bridesmaids last week, this parable provides understanding about how it is that we wait – wait for Jesus to return again, wait for the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in our midst, wait for that time to come when death and pain and crying will be no more. How is it that we wait? Last week's parable showed us that we wait together – we don't leave to go off and to try to solve our problem ourselves. We rely upon each other. We stay close because there is enough to go around.

So what does this one help us see? Think about these three servants and their relationship with their master. Can you imagine the look on their faces as they met with the master before his journey? Can you imagine their shock at what was being entrusted to them? Can you imagine what went through their minds as this was occurring? We get a little insight into this from the parable itself – the first two went out at once in their eagerness to work with what had been given them. The third considered the master and saw him as a greedy man and a harsh judge and this slave acted accordingly.

How do we wait?

Do we wait with eager attention to the possibilities before us or do we cower in apprehension of what could go wrong? Do we have a sense of wonder or a cloak of worry?

As servant and follower of Jesus, we need to think about what it is that has been entrusted to us as a community of faith. How do we hold this and use this and manage this and grow this as we wait? What is our attitude about what God would ask of us as we receive these precious gifts? What is our view of God as we wait? Are we eager with the possibilities before us or are we fearful of what could go wrong? Do we have a sense of wonder or a cloak of worry?

So, today I would remind you of this verse in Luke 12: 32 – Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. My friends, the kingdom is ours. And this gift of bearing the kingdom has been entrusted to us. We are kingdom-bearers! This is preposterous!

Shall we do this with a sense of wonder or a cloak of worry?

Last week we remembered that our basic identity is found in the waters of baptism where we received the amazing wonder of the precious gift of grace poured out into our lives. Through this we join into this gathering of servants and slaves who want to well-handle this gift of grace that our master, our Father, our beloved Lord, has entrusted to us. We pray that we might do this with a sense of wonder rather than a cloak of worry because of God's persistent presence among us.

This all is preposterous!

Amen. May it be so.