

Sermon Notes November 19, 2023
Peace Lutheran Church
The Holy Gospel of Matthew 25: 14-30
“The Good News of Christ Coming Among Us”

The reading for this day may cause much concern for modern Christians. Zephaniah proclaims that God will punish the complacent, meaning those who speak neither good nor ill of His activity in the world. The psalm response is a cry for mercy made to an angry God, while the readings from 1 Thessalonians and Matthew both warn of the imminent coming of the Lord, compelling Christians to faithful activity lest we be caught with our guard down.

The day of the Lord's coming is not depicted here as a commencement of a party, but the beginning of a trial that will certainly find us wanting if we are not diligent in both faithful living and acts of service to others.

Matthew's parable in particular puts our call and charge in perspective. In modern terms, a biblical talent might be worth one million in today's dollars; therefore these servants are entrusted with five million, two million, and one million dollars respectively when their master departs for an unspecified lengthy absence. They are entrusted with at least a whole lifetime of earnings for the average person, one of them with maybe as much as five lifetimes. Such a sum is staggering. Perhaps it is no wonder the servant entrusted with the equivalent of one million dollars is immobilized with fear at the possibilities stretched out before him.

One temptation here is to avoid the discussion of money altogether, another is to use these texts solely to interpret money. But perhaps a more fruitful road is to consider the whole of our lives as the subject of these texts, and explore what faithful living as whole people of God might entail. This gives me the opportunity to examine the Christian's foundational orientation to life and to God.

Like the one servant, it is possible to be so scared of the potential in the gifts bestowed that stagnation ensues. What does stagnant life look like today? My imagination of the stagnant life needs no prompting, I am sure.

How, on the other hand, do I offer a glimpse of a whole life and a whole communal life returned faithfully to God? Individual offerings and investments to the congregation and world in terms of financial offerings, the development and pursuit of vocation, and time given to various philanthropic organizations might be more the order of the day. But we must also remember that the

scriptures are read aloud to an assembly. The entire assembly is called to faithfulness and productive use of the gifts God has granted. The entire assembly is called upon to assess its collective gifts and resources, and to discern a faithful path forward in the investment and use of these gifts – gifts both to bless God for the provision and to bless people who may experience the presence and providence of a gracious God as the congregation extends itself in service, support, and care for others.

The readings for the day encourage me to navigate the space between fear and potential, even as we are all called to remember that “God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5: 9). An opportunity exists today to help people view salvation through a different lens: perhaps it is not only a particular eternal destination, but a way of seeing, claiming, and using the gifts God has bestowed on us while we still “belong to the day” (5:80).

