

Sunday closest to November 16

Year A
Proper 28
RCL

[Judges 4:1-7](#)
[Psalm 123](#)
[1 Thessalonians](#)
[5:1-11](#)
[Matthew 25:14-30](#)

In those early days following Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus' followers believed that Christ was coming soon after his ascension. Be ready. Be alert. Be watchful. For no one knows about that day or the hour. And so they waited- preparing themselves for Jesus' return at any moment. And when that didn't happen immediately, there were bound to be struggles. It seems to be particularly true for Matthew's community as we have multiple parables speaking to a person's absence. Notice with me how what we call the parable of the unjust steward or the parable of the talents doesn't begin with: the kingdom of heaven is like.

I've almost always looked at this parable as a kingdom of heaven parable, and had a visceral reaction to those final lines- I don't believe in an angry God, who deals in harsh punishments and abandons the beloved creation into the outer darkness. And that's where I made my mistake in framing the parable. It's like taking an exam. You read and re-read the question to find out what the question is truly asking and before you can

answer. What is this parable showing us? As our Children and Family Minister Zoe reminded us last week, parables have no right answers and interpretations vary all the time, but we get a clue from that first line. This parable, like the bridesmaid before, is about someone who has left or whose return has been delayed. Jesus said, "It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves. And then he away." Luke, in using a similar parable, spells it out, "As they were listening to this, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately." Jesus had turned his face to Jerusalem, he knew what was next. What would his disciples do when he went away?

And yet, looking at the state of the world currently, he hasn't come back yet. Matthew was written somewhere around 80-90 AD. That's 50 or so years past Christ's death, and he had not yet returned. What do you do when you so desperately want something to happen but it's delayed? How do you continue living?

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. The world is full of atrocious things, but we don't need to be driven by fear like the third servant, because the world is also filled with lovely, beautiful things, too. Fear is not a great motivator in the long term. We don't know why the third fears the master. We don't get any

sort of inkling that the other two feel this way. Remember those words to Thessalonians- 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 life. This is a much better outfit to have on than fear.

If you haven't noticed, the world is in a hurry. And as the world continues to what feels like its combusting, I'm becoming more and more impatient for the kingdom of God to be fully realized. But real Gospel change in the midst of waiting for something you so desperately desire according to blogger Katie Katy Kate that it takes- work, humility, failure, persistence, and centering someone else's voice. And patience. There is no resurrection without some sort of death. The Gospel is nothing to be kept safe and sound. Like the third servant said, "Look, I protected it!" We don't need to protect the gospel, but rather let it loose charging into the world. Burying the money was traditionally regarded as the best security against theft. It's even been said in Feasting on the Word that he showed a timid prudence in an uncertain economic and political environment in first century Palestine. Sound familiar? History was made in a number of elections this past week. In particular, when Danica Roem became the first transgender person to be elected to Virginia's state legislature. When asked about her opponent, a man who called himself the "chief homophobe" in the state, she said, "I don't attack my constituents. Bob is my constituent now."

That's what we find in this parable- as John Buchanan would say, "The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is not to risk anything, not to care deeply and profoundly enough about anything to invest deeply, to give your heart away and in the process risk everything."

This is what living in Matthew's community meant. Taking risks for the Good News. Not burying it, not being afraid. But taking what you have and expanding it. And it means the same for us to. I don't wait very well. Sometimes, I go inward. I curl up. Hope the waiting passes. Sometimes, that feels more palatable than taking a risk. We don't know what will happen when we do take that risk. Maybe, we'll end up in a dark place regardless. But God is out in the outer darkness. Remember, in the ancient context, the outer darkness meant beyond the walls of the city. Which is exactly where Jesus was crucified. God is already there. Taking those risks with you.

It's always a different perspective when we think big picture. When we shift our framework of this parable from an isolated understanding of a mean or angry God vs. believing in a God who is not physically with us. We've always lived without the physical presence of Christ. Put yourself in these early communities' shoes. Imagine their grief. Imagine a loved one you dreamt with, planned with, changed the world with, and now they're no longer here. Imagine the disciples' hope after the resurrection- Jesus told them he would be killed. Jesus told them he would be resurrected. Both those things happened and they believed that he would be back soon as he

promised. They were living in a delayed hope that was very real to them. Much more so than maybe it would be for you or me who never got to walk with Jesus when he was on this earth.

This parable is not just about using our gifts here and doing good things. It's representing Jesus while he's away, anticipating his return at any moment- not to be afraid that we didn't do enough while he was gone, but to be excited to show him what we were able to accomplish no matter how large or small. It's going beyond our comfort zones or the bubbles we live in. It's living our fullest lives in hope that Jesus will return- wrongs will be righted, broken hearts will be healed, and death will be swallowed up forever.