PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

A Message from PCC

November 8, 2023

Members and Friends of Penn Central Conference,

"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." (Matthew 25:21)

In case you have not seen the lectionary readings for the past few weeks, Jesus is in midst of parables and sayings regarding the end times and his apocalyptic return in judgment. Chapters 24 and 25 in the gospel of Matthew are full of warnings regarding the end times, what the signs might be, what is expected of disciples, and what may occur in the final judgment. The parable for this week is well known. A man (the owner) goes on a trip. But before leaving he entrusts each of his servants with some of his property. A "talent" is a huge sum of money, equal to about 15 years work of a day laborer. Each is given an allotment of the owner's property, "according to his ability", without instructions. Then the owner leaves town. We learn that the first two servants trade the talents and make more talents. Even without instructions, they knew somehow what was expected of them. But the third buries his allotment of one talent.

We know what happens next. The owner returns and two of the servants have done well with their talents and he commends them. But the third servant - he is the key to the story. He speaks of what he knows of the owner - that he is a harsh man and reaps where he does not sow. The man thunders that he should at least have invested the money to gain interest (actually forbidden in Israelite society). But the servant admits to having been afraid. He wants to return

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Contact us!

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Prayers for Penn Central Conference

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

This week, we pray for each other as we continue to live into God's calling...

St. Peter's UCC, Lancaster

Salem (Rohrerstown) UCC, Lancaster

New Hope UCC, Landisburg

Grace UCC, Lebanon



the one talent, but the owner takes it and gives it to the first servant. The ending is harsh, with the servant being thrown into "the outer darkness."

This parable is not a direct allegory about God. Instead, I see it as a parable about the disciples, and all future disciples. The focus of the story is the third servant. Jesus is teaching about what is expected of the servant, regardless of whether the owner was good or wicked. What has Jesus taught us already so that we know what to do in his absence?

We know this servant was afraid. And we know his fear was at the root of his inaction. Had he acted, he would have taken a risk. On the one hand he could lose everything in a bad investment. On the other he could do just fine and be rewarded. His fear blocks his ability to initiate action as the others did. He gives into that fear and buries the talent.

Jesus tells the disciples (and us) that fear is not an excuse for not carrying out the instructions he has given them/us. Discipleship will not be as easy as trading talents. Even in the face of troubling or evil times we are to act. Jesus knows that fear can paralyze us. That all God has given us and asked of us can be hidden away, not out of modesty or humility, but out of fear. We will lose our initiative as disciples and blame others for our fear.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus seems harsh. He is blunt and his judgments are clear. Sometimes what I read feels cringe-worthy. Yet at times I need such bluntness. I need to be told, do not blame fear because you did not do what God expects you to do! Do your gospel work anyway. Do not blame fear when you turn away from someone in need. Accept the risk. No matter the wickedness of those around us, we are still called to act despite fear. If you fail, you know your effort was faithful - and this is what God cares about. Faithful initiative, eagerness, and loyalty are what Jesus expects of his disciples.

There are countless moments when our fear paralyzes us. But according to Jesus, the coming of the kingdom requires courage alongside preparedness. Keep awake. Pray. Get to work. And be not afraid.

Peace,

Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference

The Virtual Choir is starting up! The 2023-24 season will begin with a new Christmas Carol by John Rutter for our churches to use during the Christmas season! Contact Julie Holm, bvfofmusic@gmail.com to be part of the fun! Tracks will be available by November 5, and orientation sessions will be held the week before.

Camp Director Pastor Alice shares, "please mark your calendar for next year's **HC Spirit camp at Hartman Center Campground and Retreat Center** - Sunday, July 28th through Saturday, August 3rd, 2024. In addition to the cabins and lodges, the new owners are working on RV sites that should be ready before next summer. We would love it if lots of Penn Central Conference folks are able to reserve and use those sites while we are there."

Wondering how your congregation might engage in outdoor ministry? Camps and retreats aren't the only recipients of grant funds. Kayak church, fire pit fellowships, community gardens, and solar projects are just a few of the ideas discussed for funding. The application window is currently open with applications available at https://pccucc.org/outdoor-ministry/