Sermon *Owners or Stewards?*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 11.15.26

Judges 4:1-7
Psalm 123
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Matthew 25:14-30

Let me ask you a question: what do you have ownership of? Theologically speaking, what do you own? On a theological level, we own what we take with us (after we die). In faith, we believe we take two things – love and our attitude. Scripture tells us that love never ends – death does not separate us from love. We know this to be true because when a loved one dies (including pets) our love for them does not end and, in many ways, our love for them continues to grow. For those (like myself) that read about near death experiences, love is a common theme. People that they love and who predeceased them are seen again and are drawn in love to them. So, what do you have ownership of? Love.

The other thing we seem to carry is our attitude – our essence our being of what makes us who we are. Going back to near death experiences, the loved ones seen in the afterlife, or the in-between life, are known not by what they look like (because it is not a physical world they are in) but rather what their attitude is. Do they make jokes? Do they make you feel happy, or warm, protected, safe, are they serious and deep thinkers, do they like to play tricks on people – all of those attributes seem to be with the loved ones after they pass away. That tells me we do have ownership of two things: love and attitude.

I bring this up because Jesus tells a parable about capitalism – the landowner (presumably God) entrusts capital to three servants (presumably us humans); five talents to one person, two to another, and one talent to the last servant. Incidentally, a talent is a measure of silver or gold and generally equals twenty years' worth of income. Thus, five talents is 100 years of labor. Notice that I did not say "gives" talents but rather entrusts talents. The verb is important because the landowner is expecting a return on his capital. After a long time, the landowner returns and the servant with five talents shows he has made five more; likewise with the two talents. However, the servant with one talent has buried it and digs it up and gives it back just as it was given to him. When asked why, the servant said: *Because you reap where you do not sow, you gather where you have not scattered seeds*. Now, that's a bad attitude. Since this is a parable where I am presuming the landowner to be God, it seems ironic that the servant says God is taking things that are not his own because, after all, we believe in faith that God created ALL things. Therefore, how could he steal it? The servant takes his bad attitude with him and is thrown out. That further underscores my assertion that we take our attitudes (good or bad) with us.

More on that in a moment, but first a story about what we own.

At an HOA Zoom meeting, the board secretary changed each person's name according to their status in the association – it was either "owner" or "renter". One owner changed her name to "steward". The HOA president asked why she changed her name and what it meant. She replied

that she's a steward of the property because she bought it to give to her kids and, more importantly, her grandkids. She says that she's a steward because she is tending and maintaining it until her kids/grandkids can take over once she is gone. Suddenly other owners started changing their name to "steward". The HOA president smiled and said that a steward is more important than an owner because they're not looking at selling one day to make a profit – they are interested in the long-term maintenance of the property and association for their kids.

Let me ask you again, what do you own? What are you a steward of? What do you have that you plan on leaving to someone else when you are gone.

When I was in grade school, the King Tut exhibit came to Seattle. Our entire grade got to travel to see it. I am still impressed by what I saw. The theme of the exhibit (that I remember) is all that King Tut did to take with him… and yet, here it is, he did not get to take it with him. He was a steward but he thought he was an owner. He had 48 cuts of meat, salted and prepared, to go with him to the afterlife. I wonder why he stopped at 48 and what would happen after he ate all of it. But, as you can see, it doesn't matter because he was a steward of it; not an owner.

At church I met an original stewardess from Pan Am. She was an RN and took the stewardess position so she could travel internationally. Why hire RNs you might ask? Oceanic air travel was still new and no one really knew what would happen, medically speaking, so they hired stewards to care for the flyers. The stewardess's were not there to get drinks and pillows, they were there to steward the travelers and keep them safe. They didn't own the plane but they did steward others safely to their destination.

Another steward is a ship steward. He acts like he owns the ship but he doesn't. He is responsible for everyone and all the cargo and for them to be secured until they arrived at their destination. Like the Pan Am stewardesses, they were responsible for each soul to arrive safely but they didn't own any of it.

Back to Jesus's parable, the three servants were stewards of the owner's talents. Here in lies the challenge – in what ways are you stewarding all that God has entrusted to you?

Last Sunday, today, and next Sunday we are reading every word of Matthew, chapter 25. Last week, Jesus made it clear that we are responsible for keeping our lamps lit. The light is our faith; the oil is what keeps it going and Jesus knows us by our light. If the light is not lit, Jesus does not know us, and we are kept out of the party. Those with their lamps lit, Jesus sees them – knows them – and they are welcomed into the wedding banquet party. Therefore, Jesus is responsible for the party and for seeing our light (faith). We are responsible for keeping oil (faith) and having our lamp lit to bring light to other people.

This middle parable shows that we are entrusted with talents and God expects a return on God's investment. We are stewards, therefore, of what God has given us and God is expecting us to do something with it.

Next week, we will hear about the King who separates people the way a shepherd separates sheep from goats. To the sheep, he will welcome into his kingdom because when he was in need

they took care of him. The sheep (humans) will ask the king (God) when did we see you in need? The king will reply: when you took care of the least of these my people you took care of me.

In summary, God expects us to keep oil in our lamp so our faith/light shines, God expects a return on all that God has given us to steward, God expects us to care for others in need.

So, what do you own? How is your attitude? What do you think about God and God's creation? How are you stewarding it?

A sales company (where I met Christi, my wife) looked for five attributes from each person they hired. Number one was positive mental attitude. Why? Because they could train people how to sell, manage and market but they could not teach PMA. Since then I have learned that you actually can change your attitude to be more like PMA but the company didn't want to take the time to do it (it was easier just to hire someone with it). In this middle chapter 25 Sunday, I invite you to take a look at your attitude about God. Do you think God is someone who reaps what he does not sow? Or, is God the creator and giver of all good things and God wants us to steward it to the next generation.

I was sent a YouTube video link that had a woman (a believer) sitting across from a man (non believer). They were seated at a wood table. She asked him: Do you know who made this table? He did not. She asked: Do you believe someone made it? He said: yes, of course. She said: So you don't have to know who made it to believe that someone did make the table. He smirked and said: Yes, of course. She then said, I don't have to know who made the earth that supported the tree that made this table to believe that someone did make all of this. After all, you and I agree that the table didn't just spontaneously make itself.

Astrophysicists and scientists are searching for life outside of this planet. So far, we know two things: there is life all over this planet (even in quite in hospitable places) and secondly, we cannot find even the simplest of life off this planet. As far as randomness goes, it is extremely unlikely this planet would ever form and make life but here it is; and, we can't find life anywhere else. I think if we do find life, it'll be so far away that we'll never be able to visit it. And, I believe that's by design. God has entrusted this plant, our ecology, to us; it's ours to steward, there is no other planet to run to if this one doesn't make it.

The last thing about this parable is that everyone is given at least one talent. And, age is not an excuse for not stewarding what we've been given. The landowner was gone for a very long time; the servants had grown old but they still stewarded what they were given. And so too should we. One of the best gifts we can give one another is that of our presence – conversation, checking in with one another, a smile from time to time. I knew a parishioner who late in life would write letters and notes to people. She said, "It's all I can do; I wish I could do more." I told her how much her presence in writing means to me and to all the people who receive a kind note and word of encouragement. It makes all the difference. She is being a good steward with what she has.

God has entrusted this gift of this planet to us. And we've been entrusted with this beautiful day and all of the amazing things that we have been set as stewards of. That which we have been

entrusted, we are to embrace all of it and give thanks to God. We're to do the best we can and to pass it along. Remember what we own is our love and is our attitude and everything else we've been entrusted to steward and pass along.

So stewards, may we continue to steward and to care for all that God has given us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.