THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from Region 6

ELCA

Lectionary 33, Year A

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Assistant to the Bishop for Emerging Ministers and Ministries

Gospel Text – Matthew 25:14-30

Matthew 25:14-30

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned
his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to
another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At
once 16 the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and
made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made
two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a
hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of
those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received
the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed
over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him,
'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.' 22 And the
one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me
two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, '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.' 24 Then the one who had
received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a
harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,
25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is

yours.’ [26] But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? [27] Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. [28] So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. [29] For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. [30] As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ”

SERMON TEXT:

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

My name is Pastor Dan Forehand, and I serve as Assistant to the Bishop for Emerging Ministers and Ministries in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. I bring you greetings from our Bishop Timothy Graham, the rest of the Synod staff, and from the 165 congregations that make up the Indiana-Kentucky Mission Territory. And I'm grateful for our partnership across Region 6. Thank you for being a part of the Region 6 Sermon Supply.

As many of us feel these days, every day feels like a pivotal moment in the life of our congregations. It feels like we're one bill

away. We're one new experiment away. We're one bad day away – or one good day away – from something surprising.

And pivotal moments are filled with all the emotions. Fear. Excitement. Wonder. Worry. And I'm sure you are feeling all of these things. What if we go down this road, or try this experiment, and it doesn't work out? What if we go down this road, or try this new experiment, and it works out in much more powerful ways than we ever could have expected? What if we struggle? What if... what if... what if?

Life is full of "what ifs." And our life of faith is no different. I'll be honest with you – I'm wary of those who speak in absolutes about their faith. Because it seems to me that they've either never experienced real struggle, or, more likely, they've come to believe that struggle and doubt and worry are signs of a weak faith, so they bury them down deep where no one can see. But the truth is, struggle and doubt and worry are all part of the journey of faith we travel together.

And so, as you all wrestle with these things together, I find myself struck by what our Scripture readings have to say to us today.

There are these troubling words from the prophet Zephaniah: "The Lord will search Jerusalem with lamps, and will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm.'" There's 1st Thessalonians, reminding us not to fall asleep, but to stay awake. And there's this difficult teaching from Matthew's Gospel about the servants entrusted with talents — how they used them in very different ways, and how the one who simply buried his talent in the ground receives a harsh word, while those who put their talents to work are told they will receive joy.

These are challenging readings. But taken together, they all seem to point back to one strong and consistent theme: as the people of God, we are called to be a people who look beyond ourselves. We are called to be a people who take risks, even when those risks make us uncomfortable. We are called to be a people who go all in — and even when it doesn't make much sense, to see what happens when we go all in.

Now, we're not naive enough to imagine that it will always end in roses and butterflies. Sometimes it won't go as we planned. It won't go as we hoped. We'll feel disappointed. We'll feel betrayed – maybe even disappointed and betrayed by God. And you know what? That's okay.

But here is what will never happen: we will never be abandoned by God. You will never be abandoned by God. I will never be abandoned by God. We will never be abandoned by God. God is always with me. God is always with you. God is always with us. This is true no matter what happens. If the church grows, or if the church closes – God is with you. If there is joy, or if there is sorrow – God is with you. If things make sense, or if there's great confusion – God is with you. In life and in death, God is with you. In good times and in hard times, God is with you. In sickness and in health, God is with you. In all things, God is with you.

And God loves you – not because you are perfect. Not because you always make the right choices. Not because you're willing to risk. God loves you because you are a beloved child of God. Full stop.

I know these days – in the life of the church, in the life of our communities, and for many of us, in our own individual lives – feel risky and scary. Let's own that. Let's name that out loud.

But I also know this: it's the story of our faith. God told Abraham to take his son, Isaac, to the top of the mountain to sacrifice him. Scary. And then God sends another offering. God told the Israelites to cross the Red Sea and wander in the wilderness in search of the Promised Land. Terrifying. And then God sends them manna to provide for them along the way. God sent Jesus into this world, and from the very beginning of his young life, there were people who wanted to kill him. Frightening. And yet God provides, and God blesses, and God ends up saving the whole world through Jesus.

The story of our faith has constant elements of fear and doubt, with odds that seem absolutely overwhelming. And again and again, our God shows up – sometimes in the ways that we expect, and sometimes in ways we never could have expected.

It's entirely possible that a year from now, five years from now, ten years from now, things will look different for all of us – for our congregations, our communities, and ourselves. Does that mean you failed? Does that mean you weren't faithful? Does that mean God wasn't with you? Does that mean we should simply bury our talents in the ground and hide them?

Of course not. Absolutely not.

We'll gather together to give thanks for all that God has done, and we'll trust that resurrection is around the corner. As we live faithfully into the gifts that Jesus has given us, we will know that this community didn't fall into the trap of the people of Zephaniah's day – resting on its dregs and wringing every last remaining moment of life out of itself. Instead, this community boldly said "yes." We will know that this community didn't bury its gifts, but tried to be faithful with them, and that God used them to give great gifts to the world.

Because the purpose of the Church is not to stay open until the very last person is ready to turn off the lights, or to spend the very

last penny in the account. The purpose of the Church is to send people out into the world to tell the Good News of Jesus and to serve others in love. That's what Church is all about – confessing Jesus to the world.

So, my prayer for you is that each of us may be bold and courageous. That you may allow yourselves to imagine what good things Jesus has in store for you. That you would realize life is not about surviving, but about embracing this day that we have been given. And, most importantly, I pray that you, and I, and all of us might realize – really realize – that God is always with us. God is always loving us. God is always working to redeem us, no matter what the world throws at us, and no matter where we go in this life. God loves you. And that is a great gift.

Have courage. Have joy. And may you know that you are deeply loved.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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