The Rev. Emily Dunevant

	Zephaniah 1:7,12-18
	Psalm 90:1-8,12
November 15, 2026	1 Thes. 5:1-11
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost	Matthew 25:14-30

Last week, I was at our annual Diocesan Convention…a gathering I look forward to every year. I look forward to it because most weeks, I am in the pulpit speaking and teaching to a congregation. And at convention, I get the rare opportunity to be the one in the pews. Listening and learning.

And this year, there was one message that rang out loud and clear. That is…if we are serious about being Christians, we need to be serious about reading the Bible. Because it is in our dedicated reading and listening and learning to biblical texts that we create the roots, the strong foundation, on which we can navigate the world we live in. And those roots are essential…not so that we can become diehard bible beaters but so that we can become grounded in our faith, so that we establish knowledge of God's desire for us, and so that we can participate in God's vision for humanity.

We read the book. We tell the story. We practice God's love.

But here's the catch…if we take seriously the charge to actually read our Bibles we can't just read into it what we want to hear. We can't read it in a way that simply backs up our particular political, social, or cultural beliefs. We can't proof text it and take one verse out of context from the larger biblical narrative. We can't pick the verses that never challenge us or never ask something of us.

We always must read it with an eye towards how Jesus lived it.

And what do we know about how Jesus lived? We know that he lived a life built upon peace and justice and love and mercy. He lived a life that turned the world upside down. He stood up for the oppressed, the underserved, the outcast, and the sinner. So when we read biblical text, when we work to grow our roots, we do so knowing that we too are called to the same acts of peace and justice and love and mercy. We too are called to turn the world upside down.

And so as we read the Gospel parable for today, let's read it with an intention of naming where we need to deepen our roots so that we aren't just reading the Bible, we are telling the story of God's love by who we are and by how we live.

Now…at first glance, we learn a couple of important points from the parable. There are 3 slaves. Each is given a monetary portion *"according to his ability."* The Bible names this portion as something called a *"talent"* which is an amount of currency. And one talent is estimated to be worth about 16 years of labor.

That means the first slave is given the equivalent of 80 years of wages, the second slave is given 32 years of wages, and the third slave is given 16 years of wages. None of these are small amounts. None are insignificant. This is life-changing currency that the master is entrusting them with.

And because the master distributed the talents according to each slaves ability, we can also assume that the master knew that each amount would be used differently. Different abilities, different results. He wasn't expecting the same outcome from each slave. And the first two slaves are praised for how they applied their gifts. The master was so pleased that he gave them more ways to contribute.

The problem comes in when the 3rd slave doesn't even try to use what he is given. The master is angry and we are told he sends the slave out into darkness. He alienates him from the community.

So…if we are to read the teachings of Jesus through a lens of peace and justice and love and mercy, what is the lesson here?

Richard Rohr starts with this suggestion.

We all have the movement of the Holy Spirit within us enlivening our gifts for the greater good. Rohr calls this our soul gift. It's a gift that arises within our hearts as a calling from God. And Rohr says that as we recognize our soul gift, we must work to utilize that gift fully and with integrity.[1]

And I would add that our soul gift is unique to each of us and if we apply our Gospel text, we could say that it is given to us according to our ability. We can also be assured that those gifts are 100% going to build upon Jesus' example of peace and justice and love and mercy.

In our parable, we can interpret that the first and second slave use their soul gifts accordingly and the master is pleased. But the third slave doesn't. And we don't know why he chooses to bury his gift…maybe he was afraid. Maybe he was insecure. Maybe he was just too busy. Regardless of the reason, he misses the mark. He doesn't live from a place of faithful integrity. He doesn't use his soul gift according to his ability.

Theologian Randy Woodley simply asks in any given situation…*"What is ours to do? It's whatever is right in front of us, done with full attention and love, connected to the web of relationships that sustains everything."*[2]

I love his image of the web of relationships that is cultivated when everyone is applying their gifts for the betterment of the greater community. Jesus showed us this interdependence in

[1] https://cac.org/daily-meditations/our-call-to-serve/
[2] https://cac.org/daily-meditations/serving-the-seventh-generation/

every single relationship that he had. His life, his example, was always built upon creating and sustaining a strong web of relationships. A web that was surely counterintuitive to the powerful systems back then and to the powerful systems right now. The systems that hold gifts for a select few and make them contingent for others. The systems that preach scarcity and fear over abundance and compassion. The systems that bury the gifts that God meant for good. And if we aren't careful the hum of those powerful, systematic voices will start to linger in our hearts and make us react just like the third slave, burying our own gifts for fear of what we may lose.

Dean Ian Markham, president of Virginia Theological Seminary, reminded us at Convention that the hardest teaching is always Jesus' own. And I think the third slave felt that hard teaching profoundly. But instead of acting out of courage and faith, he acted out of uncertainty and doubt. Because the teaching was hard and it asked more of him that he was ready to give.

I think we all face this same challenge. We see the needs in front of us. We feel God calling us to act. And we know beyond a shadow of a doubt how Jesus would respond because we have read the Bible. But sometimes we need to read it again, to be reminded of the abundant grace of God that is told over and over through the life of Jesus Christ. And folks, we can surely tell that story.

But God is calling us to do more. God is calling us to recognize our gifts and to live them with faithful integrity. To live them boldly and courageously. Because the world needs all of us in relationship to bring the story of God's love to life.