

## Matthew 25: 14-30 Economies of Trust

You just heard a passage from the oldest writing in the New Testament, Apostle Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. He was writing from the city of Corinth to a church he had just founded in Thessalonica, only a few decades after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. None of the gospels had been written yet.

Although they didn't yet have the Christmas story of how Jesus, the Son of God, had entered our world, they had a clear expectation of how he would re-enter the world, as final judge and the ruler of the kingdom of heaven, soon. Early Christians believed Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of the end of times. They were expecting Jesus to return soon, and when it wasn't happening soon enough, the people of the young church were getting concerned.

Paul was being their pastor in this letter; he was wanting them to not to fall asleep, fall into the complacency of false "peace and security," but stay awake and continue living as Children of Light and Children of Day, in the world of darkness that rejected their Lord, and his way of love, mercy, peace and justice for the weak and the oppressed. Stay awake, be sober, for the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

If Paul was writing this to the church folks only 20 years or so after Jesus' death and resurrection, telling them to keep on living as Children of Light and Children of Day, what would he say to us about living as followers of Christ 2000+ years later, still waiting for the Day of the Lord. Are we still awake? Do we have on the armor of faith and love and the hope of salvation of the world. Or have we fallen into the complacency of the peace and security in the way of the world. Where is the encouragement for us today?

By the grace of God, Paul wasn't the only one writing. The Gospel lesson today is also an encouragement and invitation for us to live as Children of Light in our days of darkness, while we are still in this liminal space between the coming of God into our world for the first time in Jesus of Nazareth, AND the coming of God the second time, when Christ returns as final judge and all forces of evil in all forms will meet their end and finally, God's kingdom comes, and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, just as we've been praying for the last 2000+ years. So, hear now the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, 25: 14-30.

For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and

traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.

But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time, the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 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." 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." 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." 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."

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 seed; so, I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

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? 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. So, take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This parable comes right after the last week's parable about the foolish and wise bridesmaids, which was about the kingdom of heaven, or, more precisely, about the coming of the kingdom of heaven, AKA the Day of the Lord. So, too, is this story. How did it sound to you? What feelings arose as you listened? Did it sound comforting, or did it trouble you?

I thought it started happy enough with the first two servants who doubled the money, but it quickly turned scary when the third servant hid the money for safekeeping and returned it to the master intact.... And got punished for it, severely. The point of the story seems to be, don't be that guy. But what if he's the one you empathized with the most...

Honestly, if you're talking about money management, the first two servants sounded like aggressive investors with extremely high risk tolerance, and the third servant just happened to be a cautious person who chose safe and security. Aren't we supposed to find a sweet spot for a "balanced portfolio?"

You may recall, parables use images familiar to us, such as handling of money, but with a twist, to draw our attention. Straight application of our usual understanding of how things work

doesn't work. What is the twist in this story? What was the difference between the first two servants and the third, besides their risk tolerance level. Let us take a closer look at the story.

Language experts agree that this parable is the likely origin of the word "talent" as we use in English today, suggesting the God-given abilities we have, but here in the story it is actually money, and lots of it. As a unit of amount of money, one talent is worth 15 years of one's labor. Someone actually wrote on the margin of the Bible commentary I was reading; calculating at the wage of \$10 hour for whatever hours for the year, one talent is \$312,000, just to give you an idea. So, even the servant who was entrusted with one talent, it was a lot.

If this is the story about the return of Christ, the Master who left his property with the servants and went away for a long time is Christ. What does the story tell us about this Master? We learn that the Master knew each servant and their respective abilities to be responsible for his property, and thoughtfully entrusted them all with an extraordinary amount of his money; he trusted them, giving them responsibility according to their differing level of capacity.

Then he left without giving them specific instructions as to what to do with the money; he thus gave them the freedom to do what each of them thought best, empowering them with his trust. The story begins in the Divine act of generosity, in entrusting us with an extraordinary wealth, power, freedom, and responsibility.

The first two servants were emboldened by the trust the Master placed in them, and used their power and freedom in service of their tasks at hand; they trusted the Master who entrusted them with his wealth. Their mutual trust, initiated by the Master, turns into an increase in the Master's wealth and into a more intimate relationship, with the Master inviting them to share his joy.

But what happened with the third servant? His words addressing the Master betray his distrust of the Master: a harsh man, reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not scatter seed. But there is nothing in the story up to that point that showed the Master to be harsh; rather, he is depicted as generous and trusting.

As for reaping and gathering, the Master was sowing and scattering seeds in very large amounts as he entrusted his servants with his wealth.

Perhaps the third servants had heard somebody talk about the Master that way, but his distrust and fear of the Master made him paralyzed to do anything active to grow what he's been

entrusted with, which was one talent, still a huge amount of money. What the Master had carefully given him, considering his limited ability, remained buried in the ground, useless.

What does the talent stand for in this story? The Master entrusted the servants with his wealth before he went away for a long time, and upon his return, he rejoiced in the growth of the talent he'd given to his servants.

What is it that Jesus entrusted his disciples with before he returned to his Father? Christ came into the world in the person of Jesus, lived and shared the Gospel, sowing the seeds of faith and love and the hope of salvation of the world. He then left us to continue sharing that good news, to tend to the seeds he had planted in us and in our world, until he comes on the Judgment Day, or the Day of the Lord, when we are brought into God's joy.

It is only by trusting in him who trusts and empowers us that we can count our days to gain a wise heart to live fruitful lives until he comes. The divine economies of trust multiply what God has entrusted with us for the good of the world God so loves; we only need to receive it and use it in full trust of God, the source of all that is good.

This parable, when we first hear it, may trigger fear in us, the fear of being thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, but that's Matthew's favorite way of saying "don't be that guy" but be the one who trusts in God who trusts in you. God's economies of trust free us to continue living as Children of Light until he comes, just as Paul wanted the Thessalonians to keep on living as Children of Light, for that's what we are, as dark as the world seems these days.

Our church year starts with a season of waiting for the Coming of God and concludes with the vision of the Day of the Lord when the kingdom of heaven is fully realized. That is coming next Sunday, the Reign of Christ, or, Christ the King Sunday.

Thanks be to God for the ever-deepening journey of faith, that we may grow continually day by day, year after year, as faithful servants of our Lord. Amen.