

Sermon: Children of Light and Day  
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:14-30  
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Today's first Scripture reading comes from 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. About 20 years removed from Christ's death on the cross, Paul pens his thoughts about 'the day of the Lord,' the judgement day, and how Christians should prepare for such day. Let us hear the living Word of the Lord.

*<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! <sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; <sup>7</sup>for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup>For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. Amen.*

Today's gospel reading is from Matthew 25:14-30, a well-known parable of talents. It follows immediately after the parable of ten bridesmaids, connected by the same theme written on verse 13: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor hour." Hear now the Word of the Lord.

*<sup>14</sup>"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>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.' <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>22</sup>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.' <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>24</sup>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; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup>But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless servant, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God, you have given us this day to enjoy in it, yet our minds are racing with busyness and worry, filled with anxiety about tomorrow. Would you soften our hearts, open our ears to hear the wisdom of your word, and quiet our inner voices to receive Christ's peace that passes understanding. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

A parable is a story that requires a detective work. They are filled with hidden truths between the lines that as we dig deeper into the story. We find these stories with different degree of challenge to understand their multilayered meanings, looking for a new insight to unlock the deeper meaning. Well, today's parable of talents is one of harder ones that I personally have struggled with. On the surface, the Master gives his servants something that they could not afford themselves or even dreamt of. One talent is about 6,000 denarii, and one denarius is single day's wage. Hence one talent is worth about 16 years of labor and most likely worth more than their own lives. One could argue that it makes sense that the ones with more money had to work harder to earn back its investment and therefore the servant with only one talent who buried it seems to be lazy and unwilling to do his share of work.

It is more likely, however, that master would only choose a servant who have demonstrated a faithful work in the past and who has God given natural talent to be in charge of his master's investment. Therefore, when the master decided to distribute his wealth to the three servants of same social status, they were given same amount of time, but different amount of money based on difference of personal talents. May it be monetary or skills of talent, we still need to remember that God gave them to us freely. Many have argued that the greatest gift that God has given us is within us. It is up to us to utilize the gifts which we have been endowed upon for God's glory. This perspective is also good but for some reason, it always left me unfulfilled. Like a detective, I felt like this mystery was not solved and was not seeing the deeper perspective.

What irked me was the response of the master –

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How can I justify taking away from the poor the small amount they had to benefit the rich? Then I thought of the talent to be meant as opportunities. If one had 5 opportunities, 3 opportunities and only one opportunity, will it not make it harder for the servant with least number of opportunities to make the move? If you only had one shot at making something work or not by going all-in, what would you do? Yes, just like playing a game of poker, one

with much money and skills has better chance at winning the hand, but it is not a guarantee. Probability (or risk assessment) tells us that it makes sense to not risk 50/50 and just to keep it. Much like Matthew 10:39, “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it,” this servant did not take the risk at all, hence lost it all.

This time coming to a familiar text, however, with the rapid resurgence of COVID and uncertainty of what tomorrow could bring, I am reminded of what it means to be afraid, just like the servant with one talents must have faced. To take a risk with our talents – may it be our gifts, resources, and dare to say our lives – to be used for God’s will requires us to have life of faith that entrust God for the outcome. When challenged by much fear, sometimes it causes us to pause and rethink the faithful work that we are doing.

Sometime ago when I was young and daring, I was getting frustrated with a fear that did not bother me when I was a child: my fear of heights. When your 5-year-old daughter holds your sweaty hand on a Ferris Wheel ride to calm you down, you know it is something I am deathly afraid of. When my scout troop decided to go repelling, I thought I could face my fear head on and overcome it. Rather than going to an indoor climbing wall, my scout leader thought that it would be great to couple hiking a trail and repelling experience into one. I did not realize that plan would mean we hike up for couple of hours and finish the day by repelling down what seemed like a mile down ( but I am sure it was less than 100 ft ) back to the beginning of the trail. Each of us had two lines. One safety line that was being held by two professionals at the bottom of the cliff, and the other which we repelled down on. It is one thing to practice on the ground and another to be standing on the face of cliff, with your body parallel to the ground. As I tried to take small steps towards the firm ground, I was overcome with fear, which resulted me slamming my body into the face of the cliff as my legs gave up. I knew without doubt that there are people who would catch me with their safety line if I slipped, but my body reacted differently.

This pandemic is teaching us why most often used command in the Bible is ‘do not be afraid.’ Fear causes us to doubt and makes us unable to utilize our gifts and talents. Paul’s letter to Thessalonica from today’s reading tells us why we should not be afraid and trust in the Lord. We are children of light and day, chosen heirs who are destined not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than being shackled by fear, we are meant to be like the servants in Matthew story with much spiritual gifts to take this opportunity and utilize the talents that God has given. How do we share our gifts? As children of light and day, we are called to stay awake and sober while waiting to be reunited with Christ. In that journey, we need to encourage and build up each other.

Although I did not defeat my fears of heights that day, I did repel down on my own. At first small steps which led to small hops off the side of the cliff. It was not my confidence in professional people who were there to support us that got me moving, but the confidence and trust that I had in my scout troop leader who yelled from the top of the cliff, encouraging me, and telling me that I have all that I need to get to the bottom of the cliff. Is

was not the strong rope, safety line, and the presence professionals, but it was the support of the other scouts there that day which allowed me to accomplish my goal.

As people of faith, as children of light and day, we have a great opportunity today. As the world darkens with the pandemic, our light will seem brighter to those in darkness. Thomas Edison said opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. Westminster is already hard at work stocking mini pantries; knitting hats, mittens, and scarves; preparing meals for many organizations; making phone calls out of care and love. Let us shine our Lord's marvelous light to every corner of our community and share the hope of salvation that we have in our creator's hand. Amen.