



Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Lara Forbes



Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

November 15, 2020

Matthew 25:14-30

Grace to you and peace from God, our creator, and from our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, the gospel readings get more challenging as the calendar and church years come to a close. And as much as we would like to, we can't ignore the challenges they present to us. Even in a year like 2020 that has already had more than its fair share of challenges. But they give us a lot to think about.

At the time Matthew's gospel was written, the Christian community was being faced with significant tests to their faith. Not least was that Jesus hadn't returned yet, as they had all expected him to. And they were beginning to wonder if their faith in him was for nothing. They were losing hope.

So, Matthew's writer needed to get it across to the believers that it was imperative they continue to believe and live in the way of Jesus. Because if they didn't, not only would they not be participating in building God's realm on earth - they would miss out on the fullness of life that discipleship brings to those who live it.

And things haven't changed. We're still waiting for Jesus to return, too. And there are days when each of us wonders if he ever will, and what if he doesn't, and why are we doing all of this?

But in the same way Jesus invited his original followers into a life of abundant experiences of God's love, he invites us, too. And when we accept that invitation, we participate in God's realm on earth *and* we experience the abundant life of discipleship.

When we hear this parable today, we interpret a "talent" to mean a gift or ability given to us by God. But in its original context, one talent was roughly equivalent to 30lbs of gold. In terms of monetary value, one talent was equivalent to 20 years of income for a typical laborer.

So, any way you look at it, a lot of money is in play here; and for the landowner to entrust that amount of money to the workers is almost laughable - which is the point of Jesus' parables. The extreme examples and situations were meant to get people's attention and that's what helped get the point across.

So, we know the landowner had an abundance of resources. And they invited the servants to use those resources to the best of their abilities. Two of them did, and one didn't.

I think most of us have heard, at least once, the meaning of this parable interpreted as being one of, “You gotta use the gifts God has given you or you’re gonna get thrown out of the kingdom!” In other words, we identify God as the landowner. And that is *a* way of interpreting it because we know that God is the one who will judge us on the last day.

But if we identify *Jesus* as the landowner, it shifts our perspective. Because to say that Jesus is the landowner means that he invited the workers to participate in his abundance. And that’s more in line with the character of Jesus Matthew has portrayed throughout this gospel.

When we think about the character of who Jesus is, he isn’t the one who throws people out. He invites everyone *in* to participate in the life he offers. Jesus is the one who *goes to* people that have been thrown out and restores them to community. He is the one that assures us we are loved and included in God’s grace and mercy.

That isn’t to say there aren’t consequences if we refuse his invitation, but a different way to look at it is that we bring those consequences on ourselves when we don’t participate in the abundance Jesus invites us into.

Because instead of experiencing the fullness of the life discipleship offers, we put ourselves on the outside. But Jesus’ invitation is always there.

Pastor Rachael Keefe rewrote this parable with that perspective in mind. And it goes like this:

¹Once there was a business owner who had businesses in three places - a city, a suburb, and a small town. The owner planned a long, international trip to explore establishing businesses in other countries. Before leaving on his trip, the owner called together the three managers to give them funds to expand the business while they were away. To the city manager they gave \$1,000,000. To the suburb manager they gave \$100,000. To the small-town manager they gave \$10,000. The owner told the managers that they would be gone for at least a year and expected to find the businesses flourishing when they returned.

When the owner returned, they called together the three managers to find out how the businesses fared. The city manager reported earning an additional \$1,000,000 which pleased the owner greatly. The owner promoted the city manager to regional manager. The suburb manager reported earning an additional \$100,000 which pleased the owner. The owner promoted the suburb manager to the city manager position.

The small-town manager gave the owner back the \$10,000 saying that they were afraid of making the wrong decisions, losing the money, cutting into the store’s profits, and disappointing the owner. Instead of investing the money, the small-town manager just put it in the freezer in the storeroom so nothing would happen to it.

The owner was disappointed and angry. They said, “Your fear made you act foolishly, and you are far from what I had hoped for and envisioned. You should have at least put the money in the bank and earned a little interest. I cannot promote you until you are less fearful. You will be an assistant manager until you learn to use what you have been given.” The small-town manager was sad and angry and felt as though they were treated unfairly.

When we accept Jesus’ invitation to utilize the gifts and resources given to us, it isn’t about earning more money or gaining social or political status. It’s about participating in God’s realm, and experiencing God’s presence and the fullness of what that offers to us in our lives *now*.

Because when we don’t, we close ourselves off from the fullness of life Jesus invites us into. Jesus doesn’t throw us out, but we do miss out on a lot.

1 <https://rachaelkeefe.wordpress.com/2020/11/12/stop-the-weeping-and-gnashing-of-teeth/>

Because when we *accept* Jesus' invitation, our experience of God's presence goes beyond what happens in our own lives. It extends to the lives of the people we serve in Christ's name. Our awareness of the people around us is heightened, and we become more aware of their need. We build relationships with partners in ministry and the people who are part of them.

And we develop stronger relationships with each other right here in our own faith community. Building each other up and encouraging one another to keep the faith when things are difficult.

Is there a time limit on all of this? Yeah - our lives are finite, so it's in our best interest to accept this invitation now. But not because Jesus is going to throw us out if we don't - because he won't. When we accept Jesus' invitation to participate in the life he offers, we experience it in all its fullness *in this moment*. Not after we die.

Jesus invites us to live. And he extends that invitation to us always. Thanks be to God. Amen.