



24th Sunday after Pentecost November 15, 2020

Introduction

Our readings during November speak of the end times. Paul says the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night and urges us to be awake and sober. Jesus tells the parable of the talents, calling us to use our gifts, while we still have time, for the greater and common good. In a world filled with violence and despair, we gather around signs of hope, eager to welcome the good news of Christ's coming among us.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity one God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts.

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us.

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us;

and in your Spirit, lead us;

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,

through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn

As Saints of Old

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 90:1-12

¹Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another.

²**Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God.**

³You turn us back to the dust and say, “Turn back, O children of earth.”

⁴**For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night;**

⁵you sweep them away like a dream, they fade away suddenly like the grass:

⁶**in the morning it is green and flourishes;**

in the evening it is dried up and withered.

⁷For we are consumed by your anger; we are afraid because of your wrath.

⁸**Our iniquities you have set before you,**

and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

⁹When you are angry, all our days are gone; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

¹⁰**The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength even eighty;**

yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow,

for they pass away quickly and we are gone.

¹¹Who regards the power of your wrath? Who rightly fears your indignation?

¹²**So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.**

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Though we do not know and cannot calculate the day of Christ's return, we live faithfully in the here and now as we anticipate the day when we will be given eternal salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: Matthew 25: 14-30

Jesus tells a parable about his second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await his return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Normally when we hear this Gospel reading, we think of stewardship. A big drive to sign up for serving in the congregation. A time to pledge for the next year or write an extra check. If all we see in today's passage is money, or a stewardship drive, we are missing some things.

To begin this discussion, we need to understand the biblical term of "talent." A talent was equivalent to about twenty years of wages for a day laborer. The master in this story is amazingly rich if he can give one worker roughly one hundred years of wages, a second worker forty years of wages, and a third worker twenty years of wages.

The workers are given something to develop, to make it grow. Each has been given something to use. Yes, the master is expecting something back. He expects the workers to take the initiative to develop what they have been given. That means taking risks. In order for the first two to double what they were given, they had to risk everything. They could have lost all of the initial gift. The third worker let fear paralyze him. Fear of losing the gift of one talent meant he buried his gifts down deep and didn't use it for anything.

Did you notice what the first two workers received? Not just more money, but more responsibility. They were given more work to do because they made use of what they had. The first two also received something else. They were invited to "enter the joy of your master."

Now what does all this mean? In Romans and 1 Corinthians, Paul uses "talents" to refer to special abilities or spiritual gifts. So, this means whatever gifts we have been given from God, we are to use them to the best of our abilities. We are all given different talents, abilities, gifts. That is what makes each of us unique people in the Body of Christ. Some folks have tons of ability in mathematics, music, teaching, working with their hands, or riding horses. We each use our abilities to the glory of God.

Notice that the first two workers received the same thing. They received responsibility in their area of expertise, and they were welcomed in the joy of their master. God does the same for us. We are welcomed into God's love, compassion, and joy.

Sometimes, we will respond like the third worker and we will freeze up with fear. But as Paul tells us in Romans, we all fall short of the glory of God, yet we are justified by Christ. Through baptism, absolution, and communion, God repeatedly forgives us and brings us into God's joyous company.

Right now, it might be hard to feel that joy. We ask, when will all this chaos end? When will Christ return and make things new? We don't know. Only God knows the exact timing. God's timing is different than ours.

Yet know that God was here long before we were born, is here now, and will greet us at the Resurrection. Have faith that God will be with us throughout our journeys.

Today's reading from 1 Thessalonians gives an interesting image on going forward. Put on the breastplate of love and faith, then the hope of salvation as a helmet. These are gifts that God has given to each of us. Faith in God's promises. Faith that God loves us and encourages us to love each other. The hope of salvation is a sure thing. In the Hebrew language, a variation of the word that translates to hope also means a sure thing – an event or person that can be counted on. In several places, hope is used to mean trust. Jeremiah answers God by saying, "Our hope is in you." (Jer. 14:22) From Paul, we can hope or look expectantly for God to keep God's promise of salvation. God is faithful and will follow through.

So during these difficult times, know that God is faithful. The pandemic will end one day. God will always be around to welcome us into God's joy. Share the ability, or talent if you will, of showing love to one another. Make use of the gifts that God has given you, whatever they are. Remember, God was, is, and always will be a loving, merciful God who loves each of us. Amen

Hymn of the Day

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

Lord of the church, ignite your people with the passion of your love. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations, and refine us to participate in your activity throughout the world.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Lord of creation, we stand in awe at the works of your hands and praise you for the beauty of nature. Bless the earth for your glory and restore those places we have scarred and damaged. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Lord of the nations, sound forth your justice in the ears of all leaders. Increase concern for those who are most vulnerable, especially as international leaders forge trade agreements and cooperate to end human rights abuses.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Lord of all in need, search out all who cry to you in distress. Scatter the heavy clouds of depression, chronic illness, unemployment, and loneliness with your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing. We lift these names to you...

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Lord of the stranger, stir up holy restlessness in us to extend love to those at the margins. Release our desire for control and open us to learn from the perspectives of others. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Lord of the living and the dead, we give you thanks for all the saints at rest from their labors. Rouse us to live by their example, that saints yet to come may also know your love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Closing Hymn

Oh Jesus, I Have Promised

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Vicar Mike Lang.