

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

207 South Brodie St. <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

November 15, 2020 24th Sunday after Pentecost

Words of Welcome

Fear limits us. It takes away our ability to think creatively and live with joy and hope. When we say "I am afraid" we can make choices about living in fear or living through the fear into a more hopeful future. As we prepare to consider this topic, we begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

God of all times and places, we gather to worship you.

We turn our eyes to you and rejoice in your presence.

God of all gifts and blessings, we gather to sing your praise.

We turn our eyes to you and marvel at your power and your promise.

God of all might and mercy, we gather to learn how to follow your Son.

We turn our eyes to you and seek the way you have set before us in Christ.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 24th Sunday after Pentecost, November 15, 2020 Year A

Hymn

Take my life and let it be

637

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days:
let them flow in ceaseless praise. | 2. Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee. |
| 3. Take my voice and let me sing
always, only for my King;
take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee. | 4. Take my silver and gold:
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose. |
| 5. Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart: it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne. | 6. Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself and I will be
ever, only, all for thee |

Words and Music: public domain

Opening Prayer

Transforming God,
you take the night and give us day.
You take our strife and give us peace.
You take our sadness and give us joy.
You take our fear and give us courage.

You take death and give us new life.
You give grace beyond all expectation;
you give love beyond all imagination;
you give and you give, and you give.
So, we praise and adore you as Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit,
One God, Three in One, Now and forever.

**Compassionate and loving God,
we confess we have not always lived faithfully.
We fill our days with things that do not matter.
We seek simple answers to complex issues.
We are weighed down by many tasks
yet we cannot sort out our priorities.
We fail to hear your call on our lives.
Hear our silent confession and forgive us, merciful God.**

Eternal God, in the reading of scripture, let us hear your voice;
in our reflections on your Word, let us know your will.
Then, in the living of our lives, let us show your love,
we pray in the name of Jesus, your Living Word, Amen.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner 24th Sunday after Pentecost, November 15, 2020 Year A

Assurance of Pardon

Friends remember the promise St. Paul declared:
Neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
Let us rejoice that, no matter what is happening around us,
no matter what we have done, God's deep love will never let us go.
Thanks be to God!

Scripture Reading Matthew 25:14-30 *The Parable of the Talents*

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then 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.’ ²¹His 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.’²² 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.’²³ 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.’²⁴ 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;²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’²⁶ 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?’²⁷ 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.²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.²⁹ 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.³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Message What are you afraid of?

When Ken and I started our financial planning many years ago some of the questions we were asked were concerning our risk quotient. In other words, how much were we willing to risk, or how risk adverse did we feel we were. Ken and I had different answers. I think it has a little something to do with fear, and that sort of assessment leads me to think of this parable of the talents.

Before we get into it, a few comments may be helpful so that some historical details don't trip us up. As much as we now abhor the thought of enslaved people, this story is set in a time when that was common practice. There is a master with money, and the power to decide the slave's fate. Doesn't make any of it right, but don't let that be a reason to dismiss what can be learned. Here, money represents the opportunities that each person had to do something with what they received. In fact, our modern word 'talent' comes out of this story. Originally a talent was just a currency. The word has evolved to take on the meaning we now give it, that talent is the gifts or special abilities we are given to squander or share.

Now depending on who is doing the estimating, a talent was worth anything from ten years to a lifetime's worth of wages. No need to get bogged down in that. What is important, is that it was a crazy sick amount of money for anyone to give to another person, and especially for a master to entrust to the enslaved. This is what should catch

our attention and certainly what would have caught the attention of those who heard the story for the first time.

As with all parables there are some parallels. In this case Jesus is the master and we are to relate to the slaves. Things appear pretty straight forward, and likely the way most of us have heard this parable was to understand that we are all given gifts and abilities and what we do with them matters. We are to use them well for the kingdom, and if we do, we will be rewarded. If we play it safe, well we get weeping and gnashing of teeth. It has often been preached as a moralistic story. Use your talents, your money, your gifts, or else.

Still there are a couple of things here that I think are worth looking at and it could shift or at least expand our view of this scripture. First is the three little words in verse 25, "I was afraid." It leaves me wondering what the person was afraid of, and since this story is about Jesus and God, what did they fear about God. It is as if this person has not heard the scripture which says that God is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Psalm 86:15). Numerous time those words are repeated in the Hebrew Scriptures, God is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. This is the character of God. This is the God whose Son, Jesus, came to be flesh as we are flesh. Jesus cared for those who had the least, healed those who were hurting, and taught about God's faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Yet in this story we find a person who is afraid of the master. He knows this master to be a harsh man, reaping where he did not sow, and gathering where he did not scatter seed, so rather than investing, or doing something with what was given to him, he hides it. Fear takes over and he hides the money. Take a moment and consider your understanding of God, your image of God. There are people who see God as a judge, or as a strong and overbearing Father figure, their image of God does not allow for a God who is compassionate and tender.

I don't want to ignore the fact that the end of the parable has a note of judgement. It is there as plain as plain can be, but we are to remember that none of us is all good or all bad. When God see us...yes there is a moment of judgement...but there is also forgiveness. Jesus came so that we might be forgiven, and so even in our moment of judgement we are pardoned because of the great love God has for us. It may also be that this judgement is more a reflection of how the one who fears sees God, than God's actual response.

What may be of value is to note that each of the slaves were trusted with the talents. Yes, one got more than another, but each one was given money, each one was trusted,

each was put in charge of a significant sum. Each had the opportunity to go out in joy, creativity, hope, and trust. Only one of the three lived in fear of the master.

I must give credit where it is due for my thinking on this parable. Teacher and preacher David Lose invites us to read this parable from a slightly different lens, "...being open to the reversal of expectations that Jesus' parables usually invite: no matter what you may think, God believes in you, trusts you with incredible blessings, invites you into God's own joy!"¹

So, what are we afraid of when it comes to God? I have my own fears. When I got on a plane seven years ago from Toronto to come to Thunder Bay to be interviewed for this position, I had so much fear. I was sure that I wasn't good enough, smart enough, gifted enough, and certainly not experienced enough to lead this congregation. I still don't think that I am, but at the time I was in an intensive pastoral care course and the day before I arrived here my supervisor looked at me and said, "Joyce, you are enough." Had it not been for her words I am not sure I would have had the courage to say yes to the invitation to preach for the call. My supervisor reminded me that I did not have to be everything, I was enough, and God would supply the rest. I just had to be ready to give what I had. I had to be ready to trust God.

I have to say that I struggle nearly every day with the fact that I feel inadequate for ministry for very personal reasons, that don't need to be shared from a pulpit. Still, part of the fear is that God will give up on me because I change and learn so slowly. I fear that if I really trust God that I will have to change and give up some of the things that bring me comfort. I fear that God will ask more of me than I want to give. Still, more of me does hope and trust that God is working in and through me and this congregation despite my shortcomings and weaknesses.

I don't believe that any one of us gets through life without fear, but it is when fear stops us from making the most of opportunities to grow as people, as a community of faith, and as people of God that we really have to question our trust in God's love and provision...God's trust in us and desire for us.

Again, what are you afraid of? Can it be that we cannot see the goodness of God and so choose fear and suspicion over hope and joy? We forget that our God is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness?

Our God loves us, gives us talents to use, not in fear and trembling, but for our joy and blessing as well as God's joy and blessing. Again, we will have fear, whether it is ministry,

¹ Lose, David. <http://www.davidlose.net/2020/11/pentecost-24-a-believing-and-seeing/>
Accessed November 14, 2020.

moving to a new place, facing life without someone who was dear to us, searching for our place in the world, or whatever challenge you personally face, there will be fear, but our fear must not stop us from experiencing the blessing and joy that comes from participating in God's work in the world. Fear must not outweigh our hope and courage. As we encounter each new day, and many moments in each day, may our faith be strengthened, joy overflow, and love outpoured in the name of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Prayer

We thank you, God of all life and each life,
that you are with us every day, in each challenge and opportunity.
In our weakness, you are strength.
In our darkness, you are light on the journey.
In our questions, you are wisdom for our choices.
Stay with us in these days when so much seems uncertain,
and help us to serve you faithfully, when and as we are able.

God of loving kindness:
we give you thanks for moments of joy and celebration in our lives
even amidst the ongoing pandemic,
for love given and received,
for friendships which bring us meaning and happiness, even at a distance,
and for family members who show us glimpses of unconditional love.
In all our relationships and interactions,
keep us mindful of your call to see you in one another.

God of the nations,
we pray for our country and the countries of this world,
as we all struggle to face the choices COVID-19 sets before us.
Guide those who frame laws and shape policy,
and those who keep the peace and administer justice.
There are so many new challenges to consider
and we pray your wisdom will open our leaders' minds and hearts
to develop more equitable ways of ordering our communities.

God of peace,
we remember with sadness the dangerous divisions between nations
and the games leaders play to get the better of each other.
By your Holy Spirit, move in places torn by war and violence,
to protect the vulnerable and those who advocate for justice to prevail.

Show us how to be peacemakers in troubled times.

God of healing:

we pray for those who are suffering in these difficult days of pandemic,
for those who mourn the loss of someone or something dear.

Draw close to all who fear the future.

Surround each one with your love

and show us how to bring comfort and support into situations of hurt and pain.

God of life:

you hold all souls in your loving care, the dead as well as the living.

We thank you for your saints of every age who continue to inspire us,
and for all who have meant the world to us and now live with you.

Keep us in communion with them

and, at the last, bring us all to dwell together in your light.

And now we pray in the words that Jesus taught us, saying:

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 24th Sunday after Pentecost, November 15, 2020 Year A

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

Each week we pray for the coming of God's kingdom.

Though we do not know exactly what this will look like,

we offer our gifts and our talents to God for the work of the kingdom here and now.

If you would like to make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information.

Hymn

God, whose giving knows no ending

663

1. God, whose giving knows no ending,
from your rich and endless store:
nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom,
costly cross, grave's shattered door,
gifted by you, we turn to you,
offering up ourselves in praise;
thankful song shall rise forever,
gracious donor of our days.

2. Skills and time are ours for pressing
toward the goals of Christ, your Son:
all at peace in health and freedom,
races joined, the Church made one.
Now direct our daily labor,
lest we strive for self alone;
born with talents, make us servants
fit to answer at your throne.

3. Treasure, too, you have entrusted,
gain through powers your grace conferred;
ours to use for home and kindred,
and to spread the Gospel Word.
Open wide our hands in sharing,
as we heed Christ's ageless call,
healing, teaching, and reclaiming,
serving you by loving all.

"God, whose giving knows no ending," words by Robert L. Edwards. Music by Charles Parry
© 1961, Ren. 1989 The Hymn Society (Admin. Hope Publishing Company) All rights reserved.
Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Benediction

Let us go forth to be God's faithful servants.

Where we will not hide our gifts but share them with everyone we meet.

Let us go forth to be the followers of Jesus.

Where we will not hold back our compassion but will offer it to all.

Let us go forth to be the Spirit's hope and peace.

Where we will be the grace, the joy, the wonder others need in their lives.

©2020 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> November 15.