

November 19, 2023

Introduction of themes for the day—25th Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus' story about burying fortune could have included labels to "take heart" in difficult times; especially as people wondered why Jesus' promised return was long delayed. Another label could be "take heed" at that moment when we decide whether to protect what we have or to somehow increase its value. Hardly a "The price is right question" and more about that part of the Lord's prayer, "Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as in heaven."

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

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.' 22And 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.' 23His 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.' 24Then 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; 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the

ground. Here you have what is yours.’ 26But 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? 27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29For 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. 30As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

SERMON:

When someone’s given you the equivalent of twenty years’ wages to watch over what do you do? If you’re cautious, you do what many in Jesus’ time did. You put it away for safekeeping; yes, you bury it.

What weighs more: fear of losing or the allure of increasing the value of something? Jesus is not leading wealth management seminars here—He’s speaking to his followers about the realm of God; Jesus says in his famous sermon that God’s desired world can be imagined like the lights in our homes, meant to shine and not meant to be smothered in duct tape or tucked into Rubbermaid tubs.

A Presbyterian church in our area is scheduled to close in less than two years. They’ve decided to be the church for as long as they possibly can. Last month’s single act of help for one couple in need has blossomed into ministry of providing washrooms and personal care items. What’s more the church has become a weekly gathering place where people are finding community as they share coffee along with their struggles, hopes and dreams. I think this church community has chosen to add value to what God has given them.

This week we made a stop in Erie PA to do a bit of shopping—no sales tax on certain items, you know. A polite request from someone to excuse him as he rolled by with his shopping cart full of toys became a full on conversation. Turns out the guy is from Welland. What are the odds? In Erie PA? It turns out Phillip was

scoring deals on toys and plans to partner up with whomever in our area is doing a toy drive at Christmas. Phillip speaks with contagious energy and passion about hatching schemes to increase the value of whatever's at hand; all for the sake of other people. Energetic as he seems, his health challenges are legion and major. A year ago he was in the hospital for open heart surgery and had several operations to remedy cancer. He's feeling stronger so he's filling those shopping carts and scouring the horizon for partnerships in hopes of parlaying lots of caring into lots more caring. Phillip gave me the OK to tell his story and use his name; you could see the wheels turning as he thought how sharing the story might lead to returns somewhere along the way. We didn't talk about religion or church so I don't know that part of Phillip's story. I can imagine someone somewhere saying "Well done, good and faithful servant."

These stories and ones like them can serve notice that when we pray "your kingdom come, on earth as in heaven" God might just answer the prayer by entrusting us with abundant gifts with the intention we grow them for the sake of others and for this world God so loves. Amen.