Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 25th Sunday After Pentecost - November 15 , 2026

00:24
Good morning with a question mark. It just feels like evening to me and I'm gonna

00:29
whine about this until we get more daylight. It's just gonna happen. Yeah, you

00:35
don't want to hear that. That's enough of that.

00:41
We are to the second to the last Sunday of the church year and it has been the

00:47
lengthy Pentecost season about messages for the church. As this season draws to

00:53
close, you get a sense that the parables are much more urgent and much more

00:59
compelling and I would also contend much more confusing.

01:06
The difference between a parable and a riddle maybe makes sense at this point.

01:11
That once you know the answer to a riddle, the next time it comes around you

01:16
know the answer and you can recite it and it's all settled. Every time we

01:21
encounter a parable, there isn't a fixed answer. It's not always settled. If anything,

01:29
it is deliberately unsettling, but for a purpose. And the purpose is to jar us

01:37
just enough off-center to maybe rethink things and maybe even to live life a

01:45
little bit differently.

01:48
And you're thinking, well, the parable of the talents, that's an easy one.

01:56
I'm inviting you to buckle up.

01:59
I hope you eat your Wheaties, because it's not as easy as it looks.

02:29
[MUSIC]

02:35
[Music]

02:50
The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 25th chapter.

02:57
Jesus said to the disciples, "For it is as if a person going on a journey summoned

03:06
the slaves and entrusted his property to them. To one, he gave five talents. To

03:13
another, two to another, one to each according to his ability. And then he went

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away. At once, the one who had received the five talents went off and traded

03:26
with them and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had two

03:32
talents made two more talents, but the one who received the one talent went off

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and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time, the

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master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then, the one who

03:52
received the five talents came forward bringing five more talents saying, "Master,

03:59
you handed over to me five talents and see I have made five more talents." His

04:07
master said to him, "Well done good and trustworthy slave you have been

04:11
trustworthy in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into

04:17
the joy of your master. And the one with the two talents also came forward and

04:23
said, "Master, you have handed over to me two talents and see I have made two more."

04:29
And his master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave. You have been

04:35
trustworthy in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into

04:41
the joy of your master. Then the one who received the one talent also came

04:47
forward. Master I knew that you were a harsh man,

04:53
reaping where you did not sow, gathering where you did not scatter. So I was

04:58
afraid and I hid your talent in the ground. Here, have what is yours.

05:07
But the master replied, "You lazy and wicked slave, you knew, did you, that I reap where

05:14
I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter?

05:18
Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have

05:23
received what was mine with interest.

05:28
So take the talent from him and give it to the one with the ten talents.

05:33
For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance.

05:39
But for those who have nothing, even they, what they have, will be taken away.

05:46
As for this worthless slave, throw him into outer darkness, where there will be weeping

05:53
and mashing of teeth.

05:55
The Gospel of our Lord.

05:59
Won't you be seated.

The Sermon

06:08
Greeks to you and peace from the one who was, who is, and who is to come.

06:15
And there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth the good news of our Lord.

06:22
Did you catch the non sequitur there?

06:26
What do we do with that kind of dissonance?

06:29
What do we do with this parable at all?

06:33
Now some of us were brought up to say, "Well, it's not about money.

06:37
It's about the abilities that you have been given by the creator, and you should use them

06:42
for the common good."

06:45
Okay.

06:47
Not bad.

06:49
I imagine the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts have equal mottos about preparedness and thrift

06:53
and being nice and all that.

06:58
If Jesus has authorities gunning for him, I don't think he's going to give us the softball

07:05
here about, well, do the best with what you have.

07:16
So what is this parable about?

07:18
It's not about money, I hope.

07:23

And for those of us who try to pick apart parables, fuss with them a little bit, sometimes

07:28
we see one-to-one connections with things.

07:33
Like you've heard the one about that this particular landowner is God.

07:39
Ick.

07:40
Really?

07:42
Okay.

07:44
In the first place, this landowner, if we're being polite, is greedy.

07:51
That's the whole gather where you do not scatter.

07:54
That's what that description means.

07:55
It means greed.

07:57
And the scheme that is at work is one that people in Moses' Day would have repudiated

08:02
as unjust because it automatically sets up winners and losers.

08:13
You win big or you win little.

08:18
Or maybe you totally lose.

08:24

Are you sure you want a God that because you gave into fear

08:30
is going to punch you into outermost darkness?

08:37
That was the God that Martin Luther thought he was dealing with.

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It was living under that world view that caused him such anxiety

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also is fairly well known now that Luther himself suffered from things like

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clinical depression. So is this the word we want to put onto people? Is this the

09:00
image of God we want people to pack around? Is that if you don't play the

09:04
game properly out of the pool?

09:12
I don't think so. And I think pushing that sort of interpretation does more harm than it does good.

09:24
So what are we left with?

09:29
Well, let's consider who would have heard the parable first.

09:34
Jesus' immediate followers, an arrest that is imminent.

09:38
Jesus who has collided with the system time and time again, offering more than

09:43
strident critique and even tipping a table or two in the process. The sort of

09:48
cataclysm that you might have heard from the prophets, well the disciples

09:53
experience it. And for those first century church folk who would have

09:59
inherited Matthew's gospel, there was no more temple. That the community itself

10:07
was fragmented, the cataclysm was already present reality.

10:18
We've had it pretty good as church. Did you know, I think maybe Bishop Carla

10:26
mentioned it in a sermon here even, that the church that we knew was the anomaly,

10:32
The outlier, the exception of hundreds at Sunday school and packed buildings and

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multiple services and multiple staff and bigger, bigger, bigger, better, better,

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better. Well, I worked for a while I guess. That was the exception.

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I think we are moving now into the direction to where the church was and

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and was for many centuries, we got to experience the blip. And now that the blip has passed,

11:07
maybe we feel as unsettled as that first century church. So what is the message of the parable

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then as I yammer on about what it's not? Matthew likes to do these comparison studies. You

11:28
about if your child asks for bread, you don't give him a rock. If they ask for an egg, you

11:36
don't give them a scorpion. And in Jesus' description, he says, "Well, if we who are

11:43
flawed, and maybe not all that great sometimes, if we can do better, how much better can God

11:49
do. So maybe this landowner for all of his problems, how much better and how

11:58
much more gracious is God? And what if God has indeed entrusted us not

12:04
necessarily with ability but responsibility and entrusted us with the

12:12
very kingdom of God or at least our little bit of it?

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What do we do with that?

12:26
Here's where it gets tricky.

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It may be this works, maybe it doesn't.

12:33
But the fearful person knew the nature of the landowner.

12:38
And so he acted as he acted.

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But what if we know a bit about the nature of God as being gracious, merciful, abounding,

12:46
steadfast love. If we trust in that, maybe we're less fearful that we don't

12:58
have to wall ourselves in and protect against everything.

13:04
That's a possibility. My go-to guy, Robert Capon, who wrote a trilogy of books about

13:12
parables says that it's really about bookkeeping. That everybody in the

13:19
parable sort of throws the bookkeeping out the window except for the fearful

13:25
person who lives so by the book that they bury the talent.

13:33
I'm not even sure that works for me. It's a possibility.

13:42
So, church, where does a troubling parable such as this leave us?

13:50
Well knowing that there's a string of parables Jesus is telling about the urgency of the

13:56
rule and realm of God and about things eventually coming to an end and being prepared, maybe

14:03
there's something about living into that reality or remembering that when you come to the wedding

14:09
banquet, yes, you wear the garb because that's what you do when you go to a

14:14
wedding, when you anticipate the bridegroom. You have oil in the lamp

14:17
because, well, that's the way the promised life will be. And so you try as best you

14:22
can to live into that. So that is a potential message for the church as well.

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It's also important to know or recall maybe that people thought Jesus was

14:40
coming back right away. Like in their lifetime and when that didn't happen

14:46
there was such confusion and bewilderment and upset about that that

14:52
the early church had to grapple with well what do we do now? How do we live in

14:58
the meantime. And I suppose the distilled answer might be faithfully. But paying

15:09
attention to the things that Jesus was about in his life and the things that he

15:12
declared in life. And so maybe we could think about the parables broadly as how

15:21
How do we live in this rule and realm of God?

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And that brings us right back to the Beatitudes.

15:31
That the economic scheme of the land holder is very different from the Beatitudes, but

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very, very reminiscent of the rule of Caesar or of any successors thereof.

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And so the thing that maybe we are entrusted with is God's vision of

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community being things like blessing the poor, that those who warn will be

16:03
comforted that those who show mercy will find mercy, that those who actively wage

16:11
peace will be reckoned as children of God.

16:18
Maybe that's the thing that the church can hang on to now is that this is what

16:24
we are entrusted with is that very thing.

16:29
And it is easy to be fearful because it is so antithetical to the schemes that we know

16:38
where the rich get richer and we think that's a good thing while the poor get poorer.

16:44
Maybe there are exceptions to the rule on that but

16:51
living in this contrast way, living in this other kingdom as some scholars like to call it.

16:59
That is difficult stuff.

17:04
But in the end, Jesus reminds his disciples, "It's not totally about us, and we don't totally

17:13
control the outcome.

17:16
And so I'm going to use a long arm and stretch back to something that Jesus said to his disciples.

17:26
He said, "Have no fear, little flock.

17:34
It is the Creator's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

17:44
Thanks be to God.