

A sermon preached at St. George's Anglican Church Calgary, by the Rev. Clara King, November 19, 2017.

Proper 33 - Year A

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week, we read the parable of the 10 bridesmaids, and set that otherwise very confusing parable into its proper context: the context of that early generation of Christians who had thought Jesus was going to return very soon, quite literally at any time, like perhaps *on Thursday*. Except that Thursday had come and gone, and the years had passed, and after about 20 years, the fire of the community's hope began to dim, and people began to die off, having waited so long for Jesus to come again.

It was then they realized these parables were told for them; parables told a long time before, and now recorded in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew - parables they now heard with new ears: last week's parable, the parable of the 10 bridesmaids: "prepare for a long wait, and do not lose hope;" this week's parable, the parable of the talents: "and do not be idle while you wait!"; and our parable for next week, the parable of the sheep and the goats: "be busy serving the poor in my name". Parables told as if Jesus was whispering in their ears, as the wait drew ever longer.

Today's parable begins with a master who is going away for a long time, but who will come back. And he calls his slaves to him before he goes. He gives them each different amounts of money - but these are absolutely huge amounts: to the first, he gives 5 talents - that's 20 years' worth of what most people would make in an ordinary day; to the second, he gives 2 talents - 8 years worth of wages; and to the third, he gives 1 talent - 4 years wages - more than a slave might ever hope to touch or manage in their entire lives. So this master leaves his slaves richer than they could have ever hoped to be, and entirely free to live and act as they wish.

And then he goes away, giving them no timeframe for his return.

And, he's gone a long time, but let's notice: the point of this parable is what they do while they're waiting.

While they're waiting, the first slave is busy trading with his 5 talents, and he makes 5 more. The second slave, well, *who knows* what he does, but he also doubles his money. But the third slave does nothing at all, except wait with fear for the day the master would come back - he takes no initiative at all. He hides his talent in the ground, waiting in perfect stillness for the day of reckoning.

The day finally comes: though they waited a long time, the master comes home. He praises the risk-taking and initiative shown by the first two slaves while he's been gone - he made them rich, and now they are even richer. But the slave who brings him a single dirt-encrusted talent, and a story of anxiety? Well, he's declared to be an utter failure.

But let's notice: at the end of the parable, the master never takes the talents back for himself, or the profits. This story is entirely about the initiative they have taken while they've been waiting, and how they respond to the riches he has given them.

So, what would this parable have sounded like to a community tired out by waiting? It says to them this: "the only way you will fail is if you wait idly for that day to come. God has given you abundant life, so take initiative; take risks; try things out, advance the kingdom - that's what Jesus wants to see."

Thank God they listened to this message, and took it to heart. Can you imagine if, after all these centuries, Christians had merely been waiting? We would have lost the fire of our faith long ago. Instead, we've been busy, taking risks and trying things out. Some have failed brutally; others have been profound, world-changing successes. But we have experimented, and learned, and tried new things - and that is exactly what we should have done, all these years that we've been waiting.

Well, here at St. George's we are also waiting - and just like those slaves, God has given *us* gifts, and God invites us to use them. God invites us to take initiative, to try things out, to take risks - because the only way to fail is not to use those gifts at all.

Here at St. George's, God is opening a way for us to grow and revitalize - God is opening new opportunities for us to use our gifts in new ways - perhaps even

introducing new gifts into our midst. It is as if Jesus is handing us 5 talents - more than we can ask for or imagine! - and asking us, “you’re not just going to hide this in the ground, waiting for your new home, are you?”

Over the summer and into the fall, 3 groups of parishioners have been working really diligently at making sure that our answer to that question is a good one. They’ve been exploring our gifts as a congregation, and coming up with things we can try out, calculated risks we can take, initiatives we can pilot, creative challenges we can respond to and see where they take us. They’ve been coming up with ideas for how we can make the most out of the opportunities God is offering us, and take creative risks in response.

On Tuesday, Parish Council heard from two of these groups. The first is the Discipleship group, who have been working with Dr. Arch Wong from Ambrose University on how we can develop a culture of discipleship - of personal faith formation - in our congregational life. They’ve presented us with an incredible proposal for enhancing the spiritual component of everything we do at St. George’s, and a number of carefully crafted ideas for us to try out.

We also heard from the Welcoming group, with whom I’ve had the pleasure of working on how we can enhance our welcome for newcomers and encourage everyone to continue journeying deeper into belonging at St. George’s. They’ve developed a vision for a deeper and more holistic approach to welcoming, with lots of opportunities to try things out and see how they work.

And Parish Council is still looking forward to hearing from the Caring Group - or the Support and Accompaniment Ministry group - who have been working with the Rev. Daranne Harris, on ideas for improving our caring for one another so that no one feels left behind or forgotten in our growth.

And there’s still the Invitation and Evangelism group, who are ready to put their hands to the till, but whose mentor didn’t quite work out, but together they will generate new ideas and creative opportunities for how we encourage new people to come through our doors and give us a try.

That’s a lot of potential. That’s a lot of things we get to try out. These topics are so huge, there’s a limitless number of approaches we *could* try - but these groups are helping us imagine, “what are the best things for St. George’s to try?” We don’t know what might succeed - but we’re going to give it a try and see if we can take these 5 talents, and turn them into 6, or 7, or even 9 or 10.

The important thing is to take these gifts God has given us, and to explore and experiment and try things out, and use whatever we've got.

And that's what we're doing. We are waiting in hope - waiting for our new building, and waiting for the coming of the Lord - but in the meantime, we will be active, and trying things out, and doing our best to live into God's rich abundance here and now, just as he asked us to.

May God bless us in our waiting, and bless us on our journey.

Amen.