

Rejecting Fear ~ Embracing Joy

This week's readings remind us that while living in faithfulness to the liberating movement of God's spirit is a source of deep joy, it also requires courage and. Fear is a barrier to faithfulness that can be overcome by trusting the one whose love never ends.



Focus scripture
Matthew 25:14–30
Additional scriptures
Judges 4:1–7
Psalm 123
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Focus scripture: Matthew 25:14–30

Matthew 25:14–30 comes as both encouragement and warning to all those who sign up for the realm-of-God movement. It invites us to live as though the realm of God's justice and liberation is happening now, and we can share in the joy of being part of this movement. The future is present.

The gospel of Matthew is written to people who have reason to be afraid. They have signed on to a realm-of-God movement whose leader was executed on the cross by Rome. Those crosses were still present as a means of intimidation and control. Those deemed a threat were hung out as a warning to anyone who challenged the power of Rome. Playing it safe was a logical and practical choice for lives governed by fear.

The story that Matthew recounts takes an exploitive economic system designed to enrich the few and impoverish the many and turns it on its head. Servants are entrusted with a large sum of money. Each talent is the equivalent of 15 years of earning for a day labourer. There is no micro-managing. Each person is provided the freedom and responsibility of using the talents they have received. The opportunity and the risk are the same for each, regardless of how many talents they receive.

The one who let's fear govern his life buries the talent. When the master arrives, he faces the anguish and tears of a life shrivelled up by caution and playing it safe. In sharp contrast, the two who reject letting fear govern their lives invest what they have received, doubling the talents entrusted to them. They, in turn, are given greater responsibility and are invited to share in the joy.

If this were a story about how to function in an unjust economic system, it would be a story about how those who have, get more, while those who have the least are left to suffer. This, after all, is how unjust economic systems work. Christians to whom Matthew's gospel is written

know this reality all too well. However, this is a story about challenging that system by taking those same principles used by architects of greed and selfishness and applying them to advancing the realm-of-God vision of liberation and justice. No one will tell you precisely what you are to do with your talent other than put them to use. Risk is involved. Success is never guaranteed. Playing it safe is an option. Matthew, however, is unequivocal in rejecting this cautious, play-it-safe approach, warning that it leads to sadness and despair. Those who take the risk of loving faithfully, challenging unjust economic systems, and advancing the promise of liberation and justice experience the real-time joy of the realm-of-God movement, breaking into our world.

Judges 4:1–7 creates tension with the promise of liberation and justice for all people. However, it makes clear that we are free to decide what we will do with our lives.

Psalm 123 reminds us that faithfulness never means everything goes our way. On the contrary, faithfulness to love and justice can increase our awareness of injustice and suffering, which is why the writer relies on God.

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 Paul and the early church are aware of the thin line between the present and the in-breaking of God's future. Paul's encouragement is clear; be strong, be ready to participate in the realm of God's justice and liberation. No one needs to go it alone; as a community of faith encourage and build each other up.

• • • • •

God's love and justice is both a promise for the future in all its fullness and a lived reality for all who are prepared to encounter the opportunities of love as they come our way. Life may not always turn out as we hope and expect, but our texts today are clear, we are all called to take the risk that love requires, embracing the joy found in trusting the one to whom "we lift our eyes."

 *Seasons of the Spirit* is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

Holy One, you call us as witnesses to your world-transforming love and liberation. Yet we are often cautious, denying ourselves the joy of your presence. Grant us the courage to utilize our talents and gifts. Amen.

Lection Connection links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Children in this age group are learning about the value of money. Some of them will receive weekly allowances from their parents with the freedom to decide how the money will be spent. Others receive gifts of money from grandparents and other relatives and have to decide whether to buy something or to save the money for later.

Most children in this age group give of themselves freely and without reserve. When their practical needs are met by others and they feel loved by family and friends, they can

easily believe that God's love will never run out. This sense of abundance enables them to be generous with others in return.

This week's story from Matthew is another parable. The session helps them to understand Jesus' challenging parable and find its meaning for their own lives. Children will be encouraged to use their imaginations to think about what they might do with their own gifts. Pray that the children will hear in this story the generosity of God's love for them and all creation.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 25:14–30, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 83).
- ☐ Set a worship space with green cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark in focus passage, and basket of green, flat-bottomed glass stones.
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* and *Seasons Music CD* (Volumes 3 and 9), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ☐ Bring, if possible, the song "Come into God's Presence" (p. 9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #2 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).

Engage

- ☐ Bring resource sheet "[Generous Love](#)."
- ☐ **Game group:** recording of song "Pass It On" (#7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9), or another recording of music, basket, bag of coins
- ☐ **Research group:** copies of resource sheet "[Talents](#)," calculators

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ☐ **Art zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Doing Our Part](#)"
- ☐ **Outreach zone:** circles cut from card stock/ heavy paper (about 5 cm/2 in), circles cut from fabric scraps (about 25 cm/10 in), narrow ribbon; make 5 card stock circles and one fabric circle per child.
- ☐ **Game zone:** handprint shapes (set of 5 for each team), lists of clues leading to five places in church building where people help each other, such as "Where babies are cared for" (nursery), "Where people can talk to the minister" (minister's office), "Where coffee and tea are served" (kitchen); make handprints and hide these in each area (one shape per team) in a prominent place.
- ☐ **Community zone:** invite the treasurer or a member of the outreach committee to talk about how the church shares what it has with others.
- ☐ **Craft zone:** plastic switch plate (available at hardware stores), permanent markers

Bless

- ☐ Bring, if possible, song "Live in the Spirit of Love" (p. 22 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #31 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).



November 15, 2020

Rejecting Fear ~ Embracing Joy

Scripture

Matthew
25:14–30

FOCUS To learn from Jesus that we can pass on God's love

Gather

Welcome the children. Introduce any newcomers to the group and share experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Point out the green cloth, reminding the group that green is the colour of the Season after Pentecost. This is a time to learn about what it means to love and follow God's ways.

Lead the group in the following litany:

Leader: We are on a journey and
God's light goes with us.
(Invite a child to light the candle.)
God's Spirit is deep inside and all around,
helping us as we learn and grow.

(Invite children to place glass stones in a spiral leading out from the candle.)

God breathes love into everything.

All: Thank you, God!

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Come into God's Presence" (p. 9 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #2 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).

Pray *(Invite children to repeat each line after you.)*

Loving God, thank you
for each person here.
May we feel you with us, as we learn
more about how to live in your way. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Connecting with the focus

Print the word "Generous" on newsprint or chalk board and ask children to read the word aloud.

■ What do you think it means to be generous?

Encourage children to talk about the ways in which people are generous. Invite children to listen for ways to be generous, or unselfish, during the story and their time together this week.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship area and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Matthew. Remind them that this book is part of four gospels that tell stories about Jesus and his teachings. Today we hear another parable that Jesus told. Explain that a parable is a story about something that didn't really happen but has a message that helps people understand how to live in God's way.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Generous Love](#)," based on **Matthew 25:14–30**, to tell the story.

Wondering Invite discussion on the following questions:

- **Who do you think was generous in this story? Why?**
- **What did Jesus help the disciples to understand by telling this story?**

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Game group *(for younger children)* This group will have the opportunity to review the parable through a game. Invite children to sit together in a circle. Give one child the bags of coins and place an empty basket in the middle of the group. Play the song, "Pass It On" (#7 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9), or another recording of music, and invite the children to pass the bag around the circle. After a few moments, pause the music and ask the one holding the bag to name a way they can pass the love of God and Jesus on; such as smiling, playing a game, or spending time with someone. After naming an idea, the child takes a coin from the bag and puts it in the basket. Continue to play the game until all have had a turn, then invite children to choose a coin each to take home as a reminder to pass the love and fairness of God on to others.

Research group *(for older children)* This group will have the opportunity to learn more about the money involved in the parable. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Talents](#)" and review it together. Have them complete the page, using calculators if needed. Compare answers when they have finished.

Reporting Invite the game group to share some of their ideas and invite the research group to share information about talents, the money used in the parable.

The Bible story and us

Invite children to think of their own interests and abilities, naming these aloud. Encourage children to also name gifts and abilities that they see in other members of the group.

- **Why do you think there are so many different kinds of gifts and abilities?**
- **What are some ways we could use our gifts to share God's love in the world?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

❑ **Art zone: Love map** Jesus' parable reminds us of the many opportunities we have to share God's love. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Doing Our Part](#)" and look at the map together. Invite children to help you read the ways to show God's love that are printed on the map. Have them write a short phrase or do a simple drawing to illustrate each way in the accompanying boxes. When they are finished, have them colour the map to show how beautiful the world can be when filled with God's love.



❑ **Outreach zone: Love coins** In Jesus' parable the coins can represent the gifts that God gives us to share with others. Invite children to make bags of "love coins" to remind them that they can pass on God's love to others. Distribute card stock circles and have children print on each of their "coins" the word "Love" followed by someone or something they can share love with (for example, "Love God," "Love my family," "Love trees," "Love pets"). Distribute

circles of fabric and ribbon, and show children how to place their coins in the middle of the fabric, gather up the edges, and tie together with a length of ribbon to form a "bag."

❑ **Game zone: Treasure hunt** *(for younger children)* We can delight in all the ways in which God's abundant love is shared around our church. Distribute lists of clues and review together. Form pairs or small groups and invite children to visit each "treasure" site and find the hidden paper hands in each place. When pairs or teams return with all five paper hands, celebrate together with "high fives."



❑ **Community zone: Guest speaker** Many congregations have financial resources set aside for others. Invite your guest to talk with the children about the ways your church shares what it has, such as, how volunteers are used, what partnerships your congregation has to help others, and any ways the children might support these projects.



- ❑ **Craft zone: Light switch covers** God has given us an enormous richness of resources, too, and entrusted the Earth to our care. One way to make good use of these resources is to use less energy. Distribute the light switch covers and permanent markers and invite

children to decorate these with messages about conserving the resources God has provided. Talk with the children about where they can put their switch plates at home so they will be reminders for all family members.

Bless

Gather around the worship area and light the candle again.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song “Live in the Spirit of Love” (p. 22 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #31 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3).

Blessing Lead the group in the following litany of blessing, inviting children to repeat the last line after you:

Let’s go out into the world
ready to see opportunities to share love.
God is with us. Amen.

Reflect

In what ways were the children able to identify God’s abundant love in their own lives? How might the children’s gifts be integrated more fully into the life of the community?



Generous Love

based on Matthew 25:14–30

Notice that the gender of the workers is not stated in the story. Therefore, any child can be one of them.

All people – young, old, men, women, city people, country people – enjoy a good story. And Jesus was a very good storyteller. However, Jesus' stories were more than good stories. They helped the people think more about God and God's dream for creation. You heard the story about the young women and their oil lamps last week. This story is about a property owner and three workers.

"God's love is like this," said Jesus, as he began the story. "Once upon a time, in another place, there was a rich property owner. This rich man had a long journey to make and he needed people to look after his property. He wanted people who were honest, hardworking, and faithful to him. So he called for his three most honest, hardest working, and completely faithful workers to meet with him. (*Point to three children to stand by you as the three workers.*)"

To the first one, who had worked for him for so many years, he gave five bags of money. Looking the worker right in the eye, the property owner said, "Please, take care of these five bags of money until I return." The worker nodded yes, bowed, and walked away.

Then the property owner called the second worker forward. Without a word, he handed the worker two bags of money. Very seriously, he said to the worker, "Please, take care of these two bags of money until I return." This worker also nodded yes, bowed, and walked away.

Finally, the property owner called the last worker forward. He handed this worker one bag of money and said to the worker, "Please, take care of this bag of money until I return." The worker, just like the others, nodded yes, bowed, and walked away. Then the property owner left on his long journey.

The three workers met in another room. One worker said, "Each bag is more money than we will ever see again!" Another said, "Yes, how are we to take care of all this money?"

The worker with the five bags of money went to the marketplace. There he bought and sold goods until he had more and more money.

The second worker with the two bags of money did the same thing and made much more money.

The third worker, afraid that he would make poor purchases and lose the money, buried the one bag of money in the ground, where it would be safe.

After a long time, the property owner returned from his journey. He summoned the three workers to tell how they had taken care of the money he had left with them.

The first worker stepped up to the owner. "Look, I bought and sold many goods. I now have ten bags of money for you."

"Fine job!" said the property owner. "You did such a good job that I am going to put you in charge of more of my money."

The second worker came to the owner. "See, I too bought and sold items. I now have four bags of money, not just the two you gave me."

"Excellent job!" said the property owner. "You too have done well. I will put you in charge of many things."

At last, the third worker quietly stepped up to speak to the property owner. "I was afraid of losing your money, so I buried it in the ground. Here is the bag of money you gave me."

"That is all you did with my money? You didn't make more money with it? You didn't even invest it with bankers so it would earn interest? I want nothing more to do with you!" The property owner was so unhappy with the third worker that he took the bag of money and gave it to the worker with the ten bags of money.

Jesus' followers, especially the disciples, looked at one another. Were they like the worker who buried the bag of money? Or were they like the other workers who used what they had to make everything better?



TALENTS

In pairs or small groups, read Matthew 25:14–30. Then complete this worksheet.

You may want to use a calculator, especially for calculating the last section.

A talent is an ancient unit of mass. The word comes from the ancient Greek word for “carrying,” because a talent was roughly the weight that a soldier could carry while marching. So you could carry a talent of water, food, or wood.

Sometimes a talent was used as a measure of money. You would speak of a “talent-weight” of gold or silver. A gold talent was not a coin, but a weight of money. A gold talent was about the same as a man’s weight – 50 kg or 110 pounds. Some records suggest a talent was closer to 33 kg or 73 pounds. Either way, that’s a lot of money. To earn that much gold as a worker, you would have to be paid more than 15 years of wages!

To find out the total number of talents that this story names, consider the following:

THE FIRST SERVANT

How many talents did the first servant receive?

Imagine a talent weighs 50 kg or 110 lbs. How heavy was the treasure the first servant received? (Hint: multiply one talent’s weight by the number of talents the servant got.)

How many more did the first servant earn?

THE SECOND SERVANT

How many talents did the second servant receive?

Imagine a talent weighs 50 kg or 110 lbs. How heavy was the treasure the second servant received? (Hint: multiply one talent’s weight by the number of talents the servant got.)

How many more did the second servant earn?

THE THIRD SERVANT

How many talents did the third servant receive?

Imagine a talent weighs 50 kg or 110 lbs. How heavy was the treasure the third servant received? (Hint: multiply one talent’s weight by the number of talents the servant got.)

How many more did the third servant earn?

What is the total number of talents that appear in the story?

How much does all that treasure weigh?

Do you think one person could carry all that treasure?



Doing Our Part

