Pentecost 25 – A
November 15, AD 2026

Emmanuel, North York; Epiphany, Scarborough
ELCIC Sermons by Email; Pastor Peter Lisinski

"STEWARDSHIP MATTERS"

(Text: Matthew 25:14-30)

No doubt all of us have heard the familiar cultural proverb, "Money makes the world go 'round". The evidence is as plain as the ever-widening gap between the increasing concentration of wealth among the increasing number of global billionaires laughing all the way to the bank, and the dwindling incomes of the dwindling middle class and working poor limping all the way to the food bank.

And none of us are exempt from participation in the machinations of our globalized economy. Whenever we shop, drive, send a text, use our bank card, watch television, we compromise *with,* and are compromised *by* financial forces beyond our control, yet impossible to avoid, that may or may not benefit us *personally* – but certainly *do* benefit *some* at the expense of *many.*

Well, as we've recently been reminded in a series of weekly Gospel readings, including today's, money is of major concern for Jesus too! God's people in the church call it financial "stewardship" – a traditional theme in the month of November when many congregations and councils begin to plan budgets for the coming year. Economists and government officials call it "fiscal responsibility." Corporate executives call it "the bottom line". But whatever we call it, the management of our financial wealth is the focus of Jesus' parable of the talents.

The traditional interpretation of the parable identifies God with the … generous (?) … master; the two successful stewards of his generosity as models of sound business principles; and the third, unsuccessful steward as a good-for-nothing waste of space. Each of them, all three of the slaves, receive their just reward at the end of time, either in heaven or hell. … However -- traditional interpretation of the parable notwithstanding – Jesus' parable of the talents makes the very opposite point – namely, that the *master* is the *bad* guy, and the condemned *slave* is the *good* guy of the story!

The word *'talent'* , of course, refers to money, not to ability of some kind; and one talent – the amount given to the third slave – was worth about one and a half million Canadian dollars. In total the master in Jesus' parable entrusted the stewardship of some twelve million dollars to three slaves, expecting a substantial profit from whatever investments they might make – as if he needed any more money. In the agricultural society of first century Palestine, Jesus' audience would have made the connection between the master and the foreclosures, bankruptcies and evictions, like those we hear about nowadays in the predatory tactics of factory farms taking over family farms. The master in Jesus' parable is the ancient ancestor of the contemporary business tycoon who might threaten potential lay-offs or plant closure to maintain a certain level of productivity and profitability. The current labour disputes at Stelco in Hamilton or Stellantis in Brampton come to mind.

Jesus' parable of the talents exposes the inequities and injustices of an economy that enriches a powerful few "movers and shakers" – represented by the master – while impoverishing the many powerless "moved and shaken" masses of a society that values money more than human beings – a persistent and perennial problem, as human history, both ancient and modern, as well as current events, both foreign and domestic, tragically confirm!

Jesus' parable also implicates those with enough talent – business savvy, as well as disposable income – to navigate within that system to achieve some financial security – represented by the two loyal slaves who doubled the value of their investments. And Jesus' parable of the talents also reveals the integrity of people who, like the third slave, try to resist the temptations of greed and remain true to their own moral compass in order to limit the damage of an economic system they feel powerless to change.

But, ultimately, Jesus' parable of the talents, confirms the heavy price exacted from those who stand up publicly to confront the powers that be with the prophetic judgment of God and, like the condemned slave who confronted the harsh master, only to be cast into the outer darkness of social persecution or judicial prosecution – the very place where the cross of Jesus was erected as a warning to all political dissenters and social reformers.

Speaking of reformers, Pastor Martin Luther, has this to say about the stewardship of our talents – our money, our time, our skill, all that we possess: "Christian faith," says Martin Luther, "Does not forsake the world. Yet one must cling to Christ and come to God through faith and love for one's neighbour, bearing the holy cross and suffering whatever befalls us on this account. … Christians should strive to do nothing for personal gain, nor to merit salvation; rather everything should be done for the benefit and welfare of our neighbours."

(*Luther's Works, Vol. 30, pp. 184, 214).*

Dreaming the dream of God's new world in the holy communion of our worship, the people of God in Christ are sent to *live* the dream of God's new world – a world that does *not* revolve around the idolatry of money – a worldwide web of faithful stewardship where all human beings are welcome, valued and loved – by God and one another.

Amen