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Gospel lesson

We continue from where we left off last week, with Jesus describing the kingdom of heaven in parables.



picture from https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/parable-talents/; credit: Arabs for Christ / FreeBibleimages.org

Matthew 25:14-30 NRSVue

14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them;

15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once

16 the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents.

17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.

18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.

20 Then 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.’

21 His 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.’

22 And 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.’

23 His 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.’

24 Then 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,

25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent
in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

26 But 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?

27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the
bankers, and on my return I would have received what
was my own with interest.

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

29 For 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.

30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the
outer darkness, where there will be weeping and
gnashing of teeth.’

The Word of God for the people of God

<Children’s/Interactive time>



picture from MMMS creation

What do you see? <Let them respond>

Individual blocks are just squares. What can you make out of squares? <Let them respond>



picture from MMMS creation

When you put them together, you can make shapes that no individual block can display.

We are all individuals. When we work together, we can do things that no one of us can do by ourselves.

What can you make out of those shapes?
<Let them respond>



picture from MMMS creation

When multiple **shapes** align, those who know what to

look for can see something special in them.

When multiple groups of **people** align **for the Lord**, those who know what they are looking at can see something special in their work.

If we are the blocks of color in this picture, are we Jesus? <Let them respond>

By our faithful living, we make God – who is present everywhere, always – a background to what we do – more recognizable to others.



picture from MMMS creation

What do you see when I put a border around those aligned shapes? <Let them respond>

When we put a frame around aligned shapes, others can see the message within more readily.

When we put the frame of love and our faith around what we do as Christians, others can see God at work in the world more readily.

Trust in the Holy Spirit to guide us where we need to be, even if (being in the midst of it) we cannot see the overall picture. And tell others why we do it, framing it in love and faith for others to see God at work through us – through you.

Let us pray.
Dear Lord, help us to see how our gifts from You fit with the gifts you gave others, and to work for Your

glory on this earth. Amen.

<resume screensharing in Zoom>
<Hymn "My Life Is in You, Lord" TFWS #2032>

Message: Enter the Joy



picture from https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/it-will-be-like-this/week-2-twenty-fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-2-twenty-fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-it-will-be-like-this-graphics

Please pray with me?
Abundant Giver of all our blessings,
as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please
- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may joyfully use our gifts to Your glory and inspire others to serve you as well. Amen.

<stop screensharing in Zoom>
We continue to consider how Jesus describes "It Will Be Like This" today with "Enter the Joy."

"Whom do you serve? This week's parable of the talents may not describe the kingdom of heaven, but expose the kingdom of this world - one that rewards production over people.

~~As worship planners~~ [As Christians], we're left asking: does our ~~liturgy~~ [living] invite people into that anxious economy, or into the joy of a

God whose love isn't earned?”

Has anyone here ever been on a mission trip?
<Let them respond / “Can you tell us about it?”>



Sailors take a selfie with Timorese children at Aimutin School during Pacific Partnership 2016; picture from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sailors_take_a_selfie_with_Timorese_children_at_Aimutin_School_during_Pacific_Partnership_2016._(27095242644).jpg

One of the classes I am taking this semester has been talking about the evolution of Christian mission over the centuries, with recent emphasis on short-term mission trips. Scholars Bala Khyllep and Hunter Farrell identified “selfie mission” trips, where the focus is consumer-oriented, more on impact to the travelers rather than on the receiving community.[1]

That does not mean all trips where selfies are taken are problematic; the one depicted is an ongoing partnership where the visitors and local engineers work together for disaster preparedness. It is the ones that perpetuate the colonial ideologies of white superiority, even when well-intentioned, that are demeaning to those they “help” and therefore are badly received.

Khyllep and Farrell note that God calls us to “mutually healing relationships” “rooted in Jesus Christ.”[2] After all, we all dwell in a sin-filled world, soul-sickened and in need of redemption through Christ. If we do not stay focused on God’s

[1] Farrell, B. Hunter and Khyllep, S. Balajiedlang, *Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-development* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), pp.8-9.
[2] Farrell, B. Hunter and Khyllep, S. Balajiedlang, *Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-development* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), pp.8-19.

law – to love God and to love one another (with the level of care and respect we want for ourselves) – our best efforts can go off-track.



picture from https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/wcy-judges1/; courtesy of Wong Chim Yuen

From the Old Testament lesson, it sounds like the Israelites had gone off-track too. They had settled in the Promised Land, but instead of refusing to acknowledge deities other than YHWH and tearing down all the altars to pagan gods, the Chosen people started blending in with the countryside locals, including venerating what the locals worshipped.

And God let them feel what a lousy choice that was, by allowing neighboring kings to take political control for a few years before a faithful Israelite judge led them to freedom again – the whole book of Judges is a series of how that happened over and over again through many generations.

That repetitive sinful behavior and resulting punishment makes it hard to date today's psalm because it could have been written during so many periods of the Israelite history. Yet look at how they cry to the Lord – with recognition that they can depend on their God's mercy, that the Lord is steadfast, never abandoning them to complete destruction, whose judgments and blessings are far better than any treatment by human conquerors.

Just as the Chosen people were called, God calls us to thrive in life, giving us gifts, tools, and

directions to apply. Turning to God means entering into the joy of life filled with blessings.



picture from https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-10-bridesmaids/; courtesy of Lumo Project Films – www.lumoproject.com.

And we all get to choose how we will use the gifts that God gives us. Jesus describes that in the parable today:

- ✝ Those who trust God, who reach out to others to use their gifts, build the real treasure of loving, healthy relationships, more abundant life – not just for themselves, but also to glorify God and with benefit for all in God's kingdom. Thus, God invites them to celebrate in the joy of grace made possible in part through their efforts.
- ✝ Those who do not trust God, whether through fear or disregard, do not reach out to others. Hiding what little they have, they fail to build the loving, healthy relationships that bring meaning to life. They turn away from God's plan for grace. Thus, not only do they have nothing new for God to invite them to celebrate, they cannot celebrate in what others have provided; they cannot enter the joy of God's kingdom. Instead, they lose everything.

Jesus tells His followers this in the days just before He goes to the cross. He is preparing them (and us) to continue to live as God would have us live even when – perhaps especially when - we cannot actually see God in front of us; to step out in faith and share the love and gifts God gave us with others; to help others experience the kingdom of God on

earth, in the here and now, so that we (and they) can enter into the joy of eternal life with God.



picture from https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/it-will-be-like-this/week-2-twenty-fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-2-twenty-fifth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-it-will-be-like-this-graphics

Paul reminds us that not only is it important to do that, we do not know when the accounting is coming, so we should strive to be prepared now.

Any of us could die at any moment. Are you prepared to face God with how you have spent your life? Have you fostered love and nurtured others to live in faith as most fulfills them, that they may know the grace of God? Will you (and they) be able to celebrate in the presence of our Lord?

Let's work toward "yes" answers for those questions.

- ✝ Keep striving daily for connections with God – pray, read scripture, take time to appreciate God's handiwork in nature, sing a hymn – whatever works for you to deepen your faith in/love of God, do it.
- ✝ Take inventory of your current gifts and abilities. You are different than you were twenty years ago. What are you able to use to serve the Lord now?
- ✝ Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance on how to use the talents God has given you. Our Lord and Master has the perspective and wisdom to know how our pieces fit together best.
- ✝ Step out of your comfort zone to apply your gifts and talents in new ways. Let God bless the world through you as Her "good and trustworthy slave."

May we all enter into the joy of God’s kingdom.