



66A - PENTECOST 24A - BIBLE STUDY

What are you doing

Abstract

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So, you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned, I would have received it back with interest.’ “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags.

Matthew 25:17-19

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66A - Pentecost 24A - Bible Study

What are you doing

Sunday, November 15, 2020 | Pentecost 24A | Proper 28 | Year A

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Judges 4:1–7

Psalm Psalm 123

or What are you doing

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Zephaniah 1:7, 12–18

Psalm Psalm 90:1–8 (9–11) 12

New Testament 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Gospel Matthew 25:14–30ⁱ

Matthew 25.14-30

Jesus tells a parable of a man who, before going away, gives his slaves talents (money). When he returns, he holds his slaves accountable for what they have done with the talents. Two have used them wisely, but one has done nothing – and is strongly condemned.

This week's resources explore: expectations of God; taking risks; faithfulness.

Introduction

The readings invite us to think about what it means to be faithful, what it is that God expects of us and how we should respond. 'Are you complacent?' asks Zephaniah. 'Are you asleep?' asks Paul. 'Are you interested only in self-preservation?' asks Jesus. As you listen to the readings, consider what you will say if God returns and demands that we give an account of ourselves today.

Welcome and opening prayer

Loving God, help us – individually, and as your people together –
to be your witnesses in the world today.

Help us to take risks and not stay in our comfort zones.

Bless us with the courage of your first disciples,
that your kingdom may come and your will be done
in this place and throughout the world.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Readings

Matthew 25:14–30

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ “ ‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

respond

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Exegesis

This is a difficult parable because it appears to be out of step with much of what we have read previously in Matthew’s Gospel. It feels unjust – although we should note that in this parable Jesus does not identify the master with God. One word that recurs is ‘entrusted’ (vv.14,21,23), which suggests a motivation behind the parable of what it means to be faithful. The context is of a man who goes away on a long journey, but who implies that he will return (v.14). Indeed, he does so but only after a period of prolonged absence (v.19). The danger in being absent so long is that the slaves will forget the master and inflate their own status – they will forget that they are slaves at all.

There is a potential source of confusion in the story: a talent is simply a weight of gold or silver; it is money – not talent in the modern sense of a gift or skill. The talents represent the master’s investment in each slave, an investment that is adjusted to suit the abilities of each individual. The first two slaves respond by investing what they are given, thereby building and growing the master’s investment in them (vv.16-17). The third does not – he does nothing. Or rather he buries what he is given (v.18). During the Great Fire of London, Samuel Pepys records how he buried his valuables – including a Parmesan cheese! – to protect them from danger and loss. A similar motive drives the conservatism of the third slave: he is fearful and seeking to protect himself. When the master returns, the first two slaves speak up (vv.20-23); they have risked what they were given in

anticipation of the return of the absent master. But when the third is summoned, he is defensive, fearful and protective of himself (vv.24-25). The first two speak of – and for – their master; the third is silent about the master, seeking only to justify his own actions. This is a story whose real target – the connection it is intended to make for Jesus’ audience – is Israel’s concern for its own relationship with God – and the religious conservatism that goes with it – while having little or no concern for that of other nations and peoples, or for what it really means to be faithful as God’s chosen people.

Picture pointers: ‘What is the most reckless thing you’ve ever done?’

- What is the most reckless thing you’ve ever done?
- Is it important to teach children about taking risks?
- How risk-averse is your church?



Live your Faith

Take time this week during your prayer times to sit in silence listening to what God is waiting for you to do.

We are sent out

May we flourish as we use our gifts.

May we grow in faith and wisdom.

And may ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’

be our joy to hear as we work, rest and pray,
day by day.

Amen

ⁱ [Revised Common Lectionary](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.