

“Our God In Whom We Trust!”

+ 23 Pentecost A +

Zephaniah 1:7,12-18;1Thess. 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

November 16, 2014

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The texts for this morning’s message are the lessons for this day.

This past week my college roommate, Jack, who spends his summers off from teaching 6th grade in Tucson teaching ESL in China as a mission outreach recommended a book to me by a pastor who gave up a very successful ministry to do one-on-one witnessing in China and has now come back to the U.S. The book is entitled: *Follow Me: A Call to Die, A Call to Live*, by Pastor David Platt. It begins with his “Personal Journey”

I did what everyone expected me to do. I planted a megachurch. I wrote a bestseller. I started a college, planted other churches, and spoke at conferences. But there was a big problem: I lacked peace...My lifestyle did not resemble the life of Jesus, and the church I read about in Acts seemed so foreign... I wanted the people (of the congregation) to share their faith regularly even though I rarely did. I expected the (people of the) church to live adventurously while I continued my routine....Peace began flooding back to me when we sold our home, packed up the family, and headed for Asia. We learned a lot there...to apply here in the States. The (Christians in China) displayed New Testament Christianity in the twenty-first century. They showed how rapidly and effectively the Gospel spreads when every believer makes disciples...I (now) spend most of my days in San Francisco with a group of friends who go from person to person explaining the Gospel to anyone who will listen. A church is developing where disciple making is central and unity is natural. We are quickly becoming a family. I have found it is much easier to put aside disagreements with (those) who sacrifice to make disciples. I had thought managing 500 workers to reach 5000 was the right math but I didn’t see the workers multiplying...The issue is not about having a small church or a big one. It is about how to keep the Great Commission at the forefront of every believer’s mind. It is about helping the church go beyond “come and listen” to “go and tell.”

Which brings us to today’s parable where the math is mystifying. Mind you, a “talent” is not exactly a unit of money, it’s a unit of weight and it can be of gold or silver or precious jewels, anything used in the ancient world for barter or trade. A single “Talent” was the largest unit of trade, and worth roughly 6,000 denarii. A single Talent would be a \$600,000 bill if you count \$30,000 a year as average income. You see the average worker in Jesus’ time earned 1 denarius a day. An observant man of God worked 6 days a week thus earning 313 denarii a year. Imagine, 5 Talents was 95.8 years worth of wages for the common worker. 2 Talents was 38 years of wages (my entire full-time working career at this point) and the man who got 1 Talent had only enough for the average Joe or Josephine to live on for 19 years. That is short of retirement for us but life expectancy at the time was 20 years for a newborn. If you lived past

infancy it was likely you would survive until 40. Even the last of the men in the parable could have lived a life-time on what had been given him if he'd chosen to spend instead of bury it.

The numbers here are too extravagant to be the point – 5 Talents put you in the Billionaire's Club, 2 Talents and people would answer the question, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" should the Schmo ask with, "You – you're already a Millionaire with what the Master gave you." I don't know about you but that 1 Talent \$600,000 gift given to a person who had the ability to do something with it – well, that's a nice chunk o' change.

Ah, but we're stuck in the math – in the money of the math. This parable cannot be about the money – money is not the measure of success. Each was given according to their ability – and each was entrusted with a great amount to care for while the Master was away, as they awaited his return.

This parable isn't about the money or the math but about what we do before the Master returns – before the judgment that will bring weeping and gnashing of teeth. Judgment has fallen on peoples and nations throughout history. Zephaniah is prophesying the judgment on Israel for their faithlessness coming through Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

Leap ahead a few hundred years, fly pass the Gospel and here's St. Paul saying much of the same thing, with his urgent warning to the church to stay awake and watchful for that day of the Lord—the day of final judgment – to be ready for Christ's return. These lessons and the parables preceding this one come together in the close of the church year and the change of seasons as the world outside gets darker and dimmer and colder – all reminding us that the world and the people of God are headed toward that day of final judgment.

Now it is typical with this text to point a long finger and ask, "DID YOU BURY YOUR TALENT OR ARE YOU USING IT?!" Jonathan Edwards singled the souls of many with fears of fire and brimstone as he railed on about "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" but I think the problem with the 1 Talent character in this story is that he doesn't really understand the Master (who, of course, is God in this parable). To explain it to you I wouldn't have you look at a Talent's worth of gold, silver and/or jewels but at a U.S. coin minted after 1864 or paper money

printed from the later years of the Eisenhower administration and pointing out the words, “In God We Trust” ask you “Who is the God in Whom you Trust?”

Contestant # 3 in our tale rubbing the dirt off the buried riches says, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter seed, so I was afraid...have what is yours.” That was the Master he knew – harsh, powerful – almighty - like Almighty God – but not a God in whom he could trust, for he was afraid.

The power of God can do that – strike fear – certainly our holy and just God is not to be trifled with – but not everyone could see that even with God standing right in front of them. Jesus had shown the power of God in casting out demons, healing the sick, raising Lazarus from the dead. He’d come into the Temple and thrown over the tables of the corrupt moneychangers and was telling this tale in the courts of the Lord’s Holy House high on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. He was telling the Pharisees that they didn’t know God – that they had buried their true treasure – that all the money, all the power they had curried by colluding with the Romans was for naught. All for naught because they didn’t know the God in whom they said they trusted. Jesus was right there before them. Jesus who spent His time with the outcast, the lowly, those of no regard – sinners. God Incarnate stood before them, showed them power, wisdom – taught His disciples and the group of women men who traveled with Him modeling a life of regular worship, prayer, meeting the needs of those most desperate – sharing Himself with all, regardless of rank or wealth.

Jesus, the Priceless Treasure – worth more than all the gold, silver, jewels of all that is seen and unseen was right there but they would not put their trust in Him. Instead they worked out a logical math of deeds done and rules obeyed.

God has given us the riches of His mercy in the gift of the only-begotten, His Son, our Savior and brother. As He ascended into heaven Jesus gave the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations – making disciples to make disciples to make disciples is the ultimate task of the church. In doing so the needs of all – the poor, the outcast, the lonely, be they rich or poor, foreign or your neighbor next door, will be met. Only in Jesus do we see our God in Whom We Trust – our God who has called us by name, washed us clean, forgave us all, feeds us in the Word and feasts with us at His Table. As we work together to carry out the Great

Commission in this place, in our lives may our God in Whom We Trust, Lord Jesus, our righteous and merciful master inspire us to serve Him with justice and wisdom and prepare us for the joy of the day of His coming. AMEN.