

## Adult Sunday School

### The Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost 2020 (Lectionary 33 A)

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 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." 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." 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." 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." 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 seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." 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? 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. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

*Matthew 25:14-30*

1. This section of Matthew's gospel is sometimes called the "Judgment Discourse." Beginning in chapter 23, Mathew strings together a series of sayings and parables that tell about the "end times", sometimes called "The Day of the Lord" or "The End Times" or even "The Second Coming of Christ." Scholars tend to call this "The Eschaton", which comes from the Greek word describing this phenomenon. In many periods of Church history, today's parable has been interpreted as an allegory about God's Kingdom and what we are called to do with the resources entrusted to us. That line of reasoning places God as the landowner, assumes we are the slaves, and then posits that the fear of expulsion from the community will encourage us to give generously and work to double the "profits of the kingdom," proving we are not wicked and lazy. But, such a line of reasoning seems to cast God as a merciless tyrant who only gives blessings to those who earn them. This is not what we believe to be true about God. So, we then are invited to interpret this parable in a different way.

1. In what ways does the landowner act unjustly?
2. What would you hope for, if you were in the place of the third slave, paralyzed by fear?

2. In the first century, it was commonly thought that the world would tumble down into unjust chaos and ruins before the “Eschaton.” The rich would get richer, while the poor would be trampled under their feet, and tyrants would sweep their armies over the world crushing all who stood in their way. In some ways, Rome functioned as this character in the story of God’s people (Jewish and Christian) at that time. The Eschaton, then, is God’s final answer to such suffering and injustice and death. It is often characterized as that “final day” when, at some point in the future, God makes all the wrongs in the world right again. Perhaps today’s parable is an example of the injustices that God’s Eschaton will set right. What injustices do you hope God will set right in today’s world?
  
3. The parable ends with a warning of sorts: “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.” This sounds like a statement Rome would make. It’s a statement that tyrants make. It does not sound like the way God works. How would you revise this phrase to make it reflect God’s mercy and justice and love?
  
4. We don’t have to wait for God’s “Eschaton” for things to be made right in the world. We can work towards bringing the Eschaton into the world, here and now. What’s an example of a wrong that you have experienced that has already been made right in the world?