

11.15.20

Vicar Paul

In the Gospel reading this morning we didn't hear that iconic Jesus line when he talks about parables, where he says, the kingdom of heaven is like 10 bridesmaids at a wedding, a king at a wedding banquets, a landowner who plants seeds, or a woman who mixes flour and yeast. Instead we get this different parable about a master going away and leaving his servants with five talents, the other two, and the last with only one. So I think it's important for us to understand the literary context. Over the past couple months we've been slowly making our way through that episodic gospel narrative of the Gospel of Matthew. And so, we've been slowly making our way to this point through these apocalyptic and judgment tests, particularly last week and next week as well.

But next Sunday is the Reign of Christ Sunday, so it makes sense why we sort of have slowly made our way through the gospel narratives these past couple months. The Reign of Christ, that's the day that we celebrate the kingdom that God has given us and afforded to us. But there's also another context, as I've said in previous sermons, we're at that point of Holy Week, and now we're officially on Holy Wednesday, the day before Jesus will be crucified, and Judas will collude with the chief priests and the scribes, and Jesus will be handed over, and Peter will betray him. That's sort of the context to which we're reading this text.

And so Jesus is sort of speaking about his own end times. He knows what is next for him on this journey to the cross. But the disciples still had not figured it out. And they almost never do in any of the gospel texts. It's not until the end, when they finally see Jesus after the resurrection.

So he understands his time is coming to an end. And his disciples will be faced with this existential crisis. This moment where they are sort of in fear. And they're not sure where exactly to turn. And this morning, we find ourselves amongst Jesus and his disciples grappling with this text that even for us in a 21st century mind we might not completely understand. This text isn't about wealth or a minor sermon about prosperity. Instead, it's an interpretation. These judgment and apocalyptic texts, these texts that have done many much harm in this world. As Christians and as Lutherans we oftentimes look at the judgment, and we have made this kingdom that God has given to us...sort of a, "you have to have a right card" to be in it. And so it's important for us to understand the ways in which this gospel text has been used in years past, to sort of preach a sort of judgment. To exclude women, or to exclude people of color, and to exclude our LGBTQIA siblings, they're not welcomed. Another interpretation could be that you can make some sort of connection between money and stewardship and using our talents like singing or organizing or doing whatever, and that we should use those talents instead as sort of another way of giving back to God.

But it's important for us to stop and to understand the scriptural passage. It's not about stewardship. It's not about giving our talents. It's not about capitalism. It's not. It's none of those. Jesus has been angering people up until this point. He has been angering the chief priests and the scribes. He left the safety of his Palestine countryside and came into those walls on a

donkey. He went into the temple and threw the tables. He scolded the Herodians when they were trying to chop him and get him crucified earlier. But he says wait, you have a coin here in the temple that's of Caesar. That's a problem. He has been angering people up until this point. And so, the chief priest, the elders, up into this point are trying to find whatever they can to get Jesus crucified and to keep that peace at whatever cost.

And so Jesus this morning shares this parable with his disciples, about a master who gives an obscene amount of wealth to his servants. And it's important that a talent is about 20 years of wages. So the first slave gets about 100 years worth of wages. The second one gets about 50, and the third one gets about 20. That math might be a little bit off, but I was trying to do it in my head. So, this is an extravagant gift. This is like someone just giving you money and you have to do something with it. And 100 years worth of wages will go far during this time.

And so often when we hear these texts, we assume that the master is God because Jesus says that before in other parables. But this morning I want to ask you, who do you think God is in the story, in this parable? Is God the master, the first servant, the second one, the third one, or maybe God isn't even in the story? Who is God in the story? And I want you to take a moment to just think about that when we hear this text. What do you think, who do you think God is?

In the story this morning, the master is kind of angry. And he's a little mean to the servants. And that's not the God we have come to understand through the scriptural text. The one who is steadfast in love and mercy and grace and gives constant love to God's people, even when they don't realize it. Or when like Jonah or the other prophets ignore what God is calling them to do. And they decided to go run away. This text is hard. But we're left here as followers in this movement centuries after Jesus and the folks who wrote the Gospel of Matthew wrote it. And where are we as followers in this Jesus movement?

The third servant dug a hole. The first went to the banker and doubled his money. The second did the same. In the Gospel texts this morning, the master entrusts the servants with these talents, an extraordinary gift. And I think it's easiest for us to get caught up in the Master's actions, to ask who is God in the story. But the parables and the allegories have always under Jesus sort of flipped our own understandings of these texts. What we view, what the disciples heard. And Jesus flips it. He reminds us to think about it in different ways. In this morning's text, the master gives this gift of a talent. Are we going to dig it in the ground, that gift of grace and mercy from God? Are we going to dig it in the ground, or are we going to go make disciples?

This relationship of God is much bigger than us. And the world is changing. There's brokenness everywhere, a divided nation, and people in the streets demanding justice. And the people of God are crying out here and wanting to see that moment. And it's easiest for us to get caught up in trying the nuances of the gospel texts, but this morning we are being invited, we are given this gift of grace and mercy. What are we going to do with it?

I want you to take a moment to think about ways in which in your daily life, you can give that gift of grace, mercy and love to one another in this world. A world that is crying out, people who are

crying out. And in this time where we're asked to be staying physically distanced, we can still give a slimmer of hope to one another. Even during this time. Maybe it's calling or texting a friend that you haven't talked to in a while, maybe they voted for the other person. But this morning we're called to share that love and mercy with one another, to give that gift that we have been given, not to dig it in the ground, but to share it with others. I think that's a powerful way to end this gospel.

Amen.