

**November 19 2023:
Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost**

Main Idea: God calls us to take risks, because in a life of faith, risks are what help us to grow.

This story gets complicated fast in a capitalist context. When we draw out the promise this text holds for us, we have to be careful not to play into any prosperity gospel biases. (We have to avoid thinking that more money equates to more worthiness, better understanding or stronger faith.)

Let's think of it this way: at face value that this gospel text commends risk-takers. After all, the servants who engaged in trade ended up with far more talents than the servant who didn't. But the final number of talents is not what is important. That end result is not what the man is using to judge his servants' success.

He was actually evaluating his servants' respective approaches to stewardship, their responses to being given something great. What pleased him about the efforts of the first two servants was their trustworthiness—their positive, energetic and enthusiastic response to having been given so much. Had the first two servants made bad trades and came back to the man with fewer talents, we can assume is that the praise he gave them would have stayed the same—it was their approach that he appreciated and rewarded.

The third servant's intentions were good—he wanted to be sure to mitigate risk so that the man would not end up losing anything. But that intention was centered on the end result instead of the approach. This servant is thought in terms of the number of talents and not the number of opportunities the talents can provide. His decisions stemmed from a posture of fear—a mindset of scarcity—while the decisions of the other two servants stemmed from postures of curiosity and mindsets of abundance.

On this side of history, we in the church profess to know where we will end up through our faith in Jesus Christ. Saved. Redeemed. Enjoying eternal life in the dwelling place God has prepared for us. This is the “talent” that has been entrusted to us. So, we cannot bury it and do nothing with it. We are charged to take that talent into the world and use it—to share it and to grow it and to see all that it might be able to do.

We don't always know how that will go. We don't always know how that might look or be received. But that's the kind of risk that it's important for us to take. That kind of risk deepens our connection with God and with one another. That kind of risk is what our 1 Thessalonians text is illustrating—the kind of risk where we keep awake to look for what God might be doing through us.

Scripture Summary

Jesus challenges hearers with a troubling parable about investing. What are we to make of Jesus' words?



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



GOD'S WORD for Today

November 19, 2023
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First Reading: Judges 4:1-7

4 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. ²So the Lord sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. ³Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years. ⁴At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. ⁵She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. ⁶She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. ⁷I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.’”

Psalm: Psalm 123

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

5 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the

breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then 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.’ ²¹His 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.’ ²²And 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.’ ²³His 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.’ ²⁴Then 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; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But 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? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For 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. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’