

33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A) *The Rev. Peter C. Jacobson, STS*
 Matthew 25:14-30 Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
 November 13, 2011 Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Periodically, the Board of Pensions of our Church, sends out reports and investment allocation forms to pastors and other enrolled members. I suspect these papers are quite similar to those for other people who are enrolled in a pension plan with their employer. The reports recount how each person's pension investments have performed for the past quarter year. And the investment allocation forms are given so that each person can decide how much they want to invest in historically higher risk funds, or lower risk funds.

And it seems that it is always mentioned, that while stock funds have historically shown the greatest return, they are also more volatile and more susceptible to downturns than are the lower risk bond funds. And so each person is advised to consider how risky or cautious they want be as they decide where to invest their retirement savings.

And of course, it makes a *difference*; over the span of a forty year career, a few percentage points up or down, can greatly affect the ending balance of one's account. Greater risk can mean greater returns in the long run.

The last decade, stock funds have been volatile, to say the least. And in light of that, I suppose one could argue that the *least risky* option of all, would be to simply take one's savings and put it in a safety deposit box. One would then *never* have to worry about ever losing any principal. But of course, there would also *never be any growth*. And in fact, if one accounts for inflation, there would be a *significant loss*. Any financial planner will tell you the elemental truth that if you want to have any sort of fruitful retirement, you must put your investment at *some risk*. If you want your money to *grow*, you have to put it to *work*; you have to be willing to take *some risk*.

Our Lord Jesus uses a similar example in this morning's parable. A rich man is going on a trip, and so he entrusts his wealth to his servants. To one he gives five talents, or roughly 500 pounds of silver, worth about 75 years of labor. Another receives two talents, worth about 30 years of labor. And a third receives one talent, worth about 15 years labor. The rich man must have truly trusted his servants to have committed so much money to each one.

Well, two of the servants put that money to work. They take the risk of *investing* it, and make even more money. In fact they double their master's investment, and so he rewards them and gives them even greater responsibilities.

But the third servant essentially does *nothing*. He is scared, apparently, of what his master might do to him if he tried to invest that one talent and ended up losing it. And so in his fear, he simply digs a hole, and *buries* what his master had entrusted to him. He erroneously thinks he is secure in simply *hiding* the talent.

Of course, the master could have simply buried it himself, if that was his desire. But the master wanted this third servant too, to *invest* his money, and *put it to work*. So when the master discovers that this servant hasn't done anything with the money, he takes the talent from him, calls him *wicked* and *lazy*, and he casts him out of his household.

In this parable, our Lord Jesus is very clear, that God *desires* and *expects us* to invest what he has entrusted to us. God will not have us simply *hide*, or *sit upon* the gifts he's given to us. We are called to *venture forth*, and *put them to work*. We are called to *take a risk*, and *invest* what God has entrusted to us, so that an even greater return might be produced.

Now the parable speaks of money and financial investment, and at this time of year when we're thinking about stewardship, we can surely apply it to the matter of our financial stewardship of God's gifts. But Jesus is surely pointing us to something even more fundamental, and ultimately more important. For among all the good gifts God has given to his people, surely the greatest treasure he has entrusted to his Church, the greatest treasure that he has entrusted to you and to me and to every Christian, is the *Gospel*: the *good news of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ*. The good news of *forgiveness* and *new life*. The good news of *reconciliation* and *healing*. The good news of *freedom from bondage*, and of *justice* and *hope*. The greatest treasure entrusted to each of us is the incredible *good news of salvation in Jesus Christ*.

And again, Jesus here tells us that as we have been *given* the *gift* of the Gospel, so now we are to *put that gift to work* for the furthering of God's kingdom. There is no time to rest on our laurels. For there is work to be done until the master comes again and settles all his accounts.

In our First Reading, we also heard from the prophet Zephaniah, that *God will not have his people sitting idly*, self-satisfied and indifferent to the needs of those around them. Zephaniah declares the word of the Lord:

*I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish [those]
who are thickening upon their lees.* (1:12)

"Thickening upon their lees" is sometimes translated as "resting on the dregs," and it is apparently a reference to wine-making. The dregs are the sediment that gathers at the bottom of a wine vat. If the wine is not stirred up, or poured from vat to vat while it is fermenting, then it becomes thick and syrupy, and lacks strength. So, if a decent vintage is to be produced, *work must be done*. One cannot just let the wine *sit there*.

Even so then, to be faithful disciples of our Lord, we cannot just "*sit upon*" the good news of Jesus Christ. We cannot go and *bury the Gospel*, because we are afraid and do not want to take the risk of bearing witness to our Lord. *No indeed*, God calls us to be *daring*. He calls us to *invest* the *good news of Jesus*, and *put it*

to work, to the end that a bountiful increase might be realized.

Simply put, the Church cannot be content to simply *maintain herself*. The Church must always be a Church *in mission to the world*. Likewise, our congregation — Gloria Dei — we cannot be content to just *maintain ourselves*. God calls us to be a congregation *in mission to our community* — to those around us. And finally, each of us as baptized Christians cannot be content just to maintain himself or herself. Each of us, must always be *in mission to the neighbor*. Because the good news of Jesus cries out to be *proclaimed* to a world in need of *love, redemption* and *hope*. The good news of Jesus *demands to be shared* with people who are desperately searching for *forgiveness* and *healing*.

As God's people, we cannot just sit upon the good news of Jesus and say, "Well, it's good for me, but maybe not for others." In St. John's Gospel, Jesus declares: "*I am the light of the world*." If we truly believe that, then *we must bear witness to him* — we must *share that Gospel*, we must bear witness to the One who is the light of the world.

And this mission to the world, this sharing of the Gospel, must surely be a task of both our voices and our hands. As faithful servants of the Lord, we must *speak* the good news of new life in Jesus, and we must also *be* that good news. For even as our Lord fed the hungry and healed the sick, so we too are called to provide for, and care for those who are in need. Around the world and in our own backyards — from eastern Africa, where they are struggling with famine, to our own city of Wichita — there are people who are hungry or sick. There are people who are lonely or broken. There are people in need of someone to bring them God's love. You and I are God's servants, entrusted with the treasure of the Gospel. *We* are the ones to bring them God's love.

At work, at school, at the coffee-shop, within your own family — we are all called to live lives that point *beyond the self*, lives that testify to the love of a Creator God for his creation. A love that was so great, he sent his own dear Son to reveal it on the cross.

Investing for people, gaining interest in human terms, that's our business. When we invest the gifts that God has given us and risk telling someone of Christ's love, or when we serve someone who can never repay us, then we realize that all the talent that has been given to us is not for ourselves — no, but for someone else. When we use the good things we have for our neighbor's benefit, we find out why we had them in the first place.

This great gift of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is *not our possession*. Brothers and sisters, it has merely been *entrusted* to us. So, we dare not sit upon this wonderful treasure and keep it to ourselves. *We must* reach out, and pass the gift on, to the world, to our neighbors. For then, in faith we can eagerly await the day of Christ's return, when we might hear him say: "*Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master.*"

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

