

Is That Jesus?

Parables of Jesus: Part 5 “Is That Jesus?”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 19, 2021

17th Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Matthew 25:14-30

Reflection: Psalm 124

Greeting: Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

Prayer: Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 124

If it had not been the LORD who was on our side —let Israel now say— if it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
(*Psalm 124 NRSV**)

We read the words of Psalm 124 and we hear people blessing the Lord. Thankfulness for the way the God has watched over his people and delivered them. We hear of what tragedy would strike had God not been there for his people. That our help is in the Lord. Do you ever take God’s steadfast love for granted? How do you ensure that you are really thankful for Christ being present in your life? How do you express your gratitude for all the Lord has done? How can we share in the hope of Christ’s redeeming grace?

Prayer: O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to search you out, that we may see you even in the most difficult of times. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus’ name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 25 verses 14 through 30.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was leaving on a trip. He called his servants and handed his possessions over to them. To one he gave five valuable coins, and to another he gave two, and to another he gave one. He gave to each servant according to that servant’s ability. Then he left on his journey. “After the man left, the servant who had five valuable coins took them and went to work doing business with them. He gained five more. In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money. “Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five valuable coins came forward with five additional coins. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained five more.’ “His master replied, ‘Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’ “The second servant also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained two more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful over a little. I’ll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.’ “Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, ‘Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven’t sown. You gather crops where you haven’t spread seed. So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what’s yours.’ “His master replied, ‘You evil and lazy servant! You knew that I harvest grain where I haven’t sown and that I gather crops where I haven’t spread seed? In that case, you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins. Those who have much will receive more, and they will have more than they need. But as for those who don’t have much, even the little bit they have will be taken away from them. Now take the worthless servant and throw him out into the farthest darkness.’ “People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth. (Matthew 25:14-30 CEB+)”

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Sometimes the Bible is nice and straight forward. “Love God and love each other.” “Treat others how you want to be treated.” “It is better to give than to receive.” Right to the point, easy to understand. Sometimes we have to dig. Now, I especially want to remind you that we can all read these parables differently and may find different things. This is what I found. In Matthew 25, we get a parable about a man leaving on a trip. He’s about to be absent, completely absent, so he gives three servants money while he’s away. The first gets five coins, the next gets two, and the last gets one. The rich master then leaves. The first takes the coins and goes out transacting business until he doubles the money he was given. The next one goes out and does the same thing, doubling the money he has. The last one digs a hole and buries it.

At this point, we've got questions. How did they double their money? What exactly were they doing? What were they doing with that money? I know some investors who would love to find out how they were getting such a big return. And why on earth did the last one bury it? That seems like a crazy thing to do. Everyone else is out and getting rich and here is the last servant putting his money in the dirt. And then, after a long time, the rich man comes back to settle accounts. He's back for what's his after all. The first one comes up. "You gave me five coins. Here's five more. Look at what I've gained for you." This pleases the rich master, so he's going to put the first servant in charge of much. The next servant comes up. "You gave me two coins. I've got two more. Look what I've gained for you." He is again pleased, so this one is going to be in charge of much. He's invited them in to celebrate the wealth that they've created for him while he was away. But then comes the last servant. This one has something to say. He tells him, "I know that you're a hard man. You harvest in places where you've never sown. You gather crops where you never planted seed. I was afraid of you. I was afraid of what you would do to me. So, I hid the coin. Here, you can have back what's yours." Here we get the answer about why he put the money in the ground. Fear or someone who is corrupt.

You can imagine the response. This guy has just received double his money from the first two and the last one comes and says, "I buried it and I'm just giving you back what you gave me." All this plus pointing out the rich master's corrupt practices. How do we expect the master to reply? He calls the last servant evil and lazy. He tells him "If you knew that I took what I didn't take part in then you should have at least put in the bank and gained interest! But you wasted it! You did nothing!" But now he's going to take what was given to the last one and give it to the first. And with that he demands that the last servant be thrown out into the darkness.

Seems reasonable, right? I mean, what a lazy servant! He couldn't be bothered to make any money, so why should the master be pleased? But something wasn't right. I started to think about this. And the more I thought about it, the more trouble I had. I started asking myself the question "is that Jesus? Is that who I am looking at in this parable?" If we look at this story head on, we have an absentee landowner hoping to reap great profits from those that he's given to. He's expecting something in return, expecting more than what was given. Is that Jesus? He doesn't give them advice. He doesn't give them help. He just says, "Here's the money. Go make money." And then he's gone. They're left on their own to figure out what to do. But again, I asked myself, is that Jesus? That question nagged at me. That question pulled at me. And then I started to grasp why. I don't see Jesus as a master going away and leaving me alone. I don't see Jesus coming back, expecting a large financial gain to be handed over to him. I don't see Jesus as a vindictive master who's upset that there wasn't enough profit. I also have trouble seeing Jesus as somebody who reaps where he doesn't sew, that harvests where he hasn't planted. Is that Jesus? Jesus talked about being generous for the sake of being generous. About being willing to pay a laborer a day's wages for a few hours work simply because generosity is good?

I kept searching and kept looking at the rich master, looking for Jesus. I started to think, this isn't Jesus. Now, of course, I could be wrong. It wouldn't be the first time. But the idea was there, and the idea stuck. But then it left me with a more difficult question. What's Jesus saying in this parable? They have entered Jerusalem. They are two days from the Passover. He's just talked about the temple being demolished. He talked about being careful that no one deceives you. He's talked about being prepared. Just after this he's talking about being handed over to be crucified. But I think what really started to pull this together for me is Christ's own response to this parable. Some translations begin this response with "but." A big interjecting, contradicting "but." The CEB uses "now." "Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne." And then? Then he judges, not based on wealth, but based on actions. He separates the nations before him into two groups. Those who helped and those who didn't. I started to see something in this. I started to see a parable about what happens when we conform to what the world wants. I don't see Jesus as an absentee landowner waiting to come back to get his reward. He said it himself, he came to serve, not to be served. He came to help others to help others. Not looking at us going "Here's what I'm giving you, you're on your own to figure out how to get me a good return." Because that doesn't fit in with the fact that Christ never leaves me. Christ is always with me. I can't see Christ as the master in the parable if my goal isn't to build up wealth but to help others. I can't see this as Christ asking to be paid back when he was willing to give his very life for a sinner like me.

In the parable we have that last servant unwilling to play the game. He could put money in the bank, but doesn't scripture say that we shouldn't loan money at interest? When others have a need, we simply give. I started thinking that maybe the point was to prepare his followers. That choosing not to conform to the world isn't easy. But it is worth it. That Jesus calls us to something more than the endless quest for more riches. The goal isn't what we build up in this life, but what comes next. Just like our parable. The end isn't being cast out by a greedy man that just wants more for himself. That's not the end at all. Because that's immediately followed by what Christ is looking for. Looking for those that saw him and fed him. Those that saw him and gave him a drink. Those that saw him in a stranger and welcomed him. Those that saw him naked and gave him clothing. Looking to those that saw him sick and took care of him. Those that saw him in prison and visited him. He isn't looking for those that did what the world wanted. He isn't looking for those that gained a fortune. And through this all I started thinking about what it would mean to not conform. To not play the game of always trying to have more and more and more. Not doing whatever was necessary to have even more at our disposal, but to instead stand up for what's right and for what's good. To think not about amassing wealth for somebody else but to think about how we help each other in love. And I came back to that first servant and the last. The first was given everything the last one had, the first becoming wealthier and the last being left with nothing. And then I asked myself "is that Jesus?" And then I remembered. The first will be last, and the last.... Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

September 26th – *Who Is My Neighbor?* – Luke 10:25-37

This week, we take a look at what it means to be a good neighbor when we ask ourselves the question of who our neighbor is.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Allen Goebel & Family	Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith
Bonnie Hite	Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

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