

Lectionary 33 2017
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church
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Grace, mercy and peace to you, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

The Day of the Lord – to be feared? To be desired? In today's gospel, Jesus addresses his disciples privately; this is not a public teaching of Jesus. He tells the disciples a story about great treasure. It is one of three stories he tells them to prepare them for the day he wouldn't be with them any more. He tells these three stories right before he enters Jerusalem, where he will suffer and die on the cross. Where Jesus will experience being in the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

First, though, we need to talk about "talents." In Jesus' time, if you said the word "talent" you meant the most valuable unit of currency there was. In Jesus' time, a talent was worth 15 years of wages. If you make \$30,000/year, a talent for you would be worth \$450,000. If you make more than that – well. One talent weighed between 67 and 133 pounds. It was a really big coin. You needed a wheelbarrow even to cart one around.

In Jesus' time, people believed that all the wealth that ever could exist already did exist. If someone got richer, that meant that someone else got poorer. So rich people were regarded even more suspiciously than they are today; because the majority of the people (the desperately poor) figured that whatever the rich people took meant less for them. Also, they assumed that the rich got what they got by cheating or stealing. In many cases that was true. In Jesus' time, charging or receiving interest was against Hebrew law – the law against usury referred to charging any interest, not just exorbitant interest. Also, Jewish custom was to bury treasure in the ground, as the third slave did. But Jesus turns the accepted economic practices upside down.

The rich man in this parable entrusts his servants with great wealth. One gets 75 years' worth of wages; another 30 years' worth; the third, 15 years' worth of wages. After being gone a long time, the rich man returns and is pleased with the

servants who took risks with the treasure entrusted to them. However, he speaks negatively about burying the one talent – which was the appropriate Jewish custom! On top of that, he said he would have expected to receive interest for that talent – which is against Jewish law! Plus, the third servant clearly insults his master, and the master doesn't contradict it – instead, the master acts in such a way that seems to verify his reputation with the last servant. That is a lot of weird stuff. Why would Jesus tell such a story?

Perhaps to get his disciples thinking about what they would do with a great treasure. Perhaps the disciples stopped to think, if not that day, then the day after Jesus' death, when Jesus himself was buried in the ground, that Jesus was being treated like a worthless slave, in the outer darkness. Why was Jesus treated so unworthily? Jesus took risks, he gained great honor for God. He lifted up the lowly and the despised. He shone the light of day on injustice and faithlessness. Jesus redefined who was worthy: those who trusted in God; not those who kept the law. Perhaps the disciples realized they had been given a great treasure already: Jesus had given his disciples the love of God, God's forgiveness and grace. And after Jesus' resurrection, they realized that that gift of grace that begins in this world continues through everlasting life. Is there any treasure greater than that?

Jesus wants his close disciples to take risks with the treasure of God's forgiveness; to spread God's forgiveness around; to multiply it by giving everyone else some. After all, that is what Jesus did: he took risks by showing God's grace to people who didn't deserve it. Including Matthew himself. Matthew was a tax collector, and tax collectors were despised by all the Jews – the ones who observed the law, because he had to touch Roman money; and tax collectors were despised by the not so observant Jews, because tax collectors had reputations for taking a lot more money than they handed over. The risk Jesus took by welcoming Matthew had a huge impact on the rest of Matthew's life. Jesus took a lot of risks by ignoring the law and paying attention to need. Here Jesus creates a new economy, with new rules. Rule 1: taking risks with the great treasure of God's grace is excellent stewardship. Rule 2: burying God's grace is missing the point. Through Jesus, God invests us

with forgiveness. When we don't spread that grace around, God is hugely disappointed. But God's desire to punish is not as strong as God's desire to love. Just as Jesus goes on to love in chapters 26 and 27 of Matthew's gospel, when he suffers and dies. God does not punish the world for killing his son, the instrument of God's grace and love. So the prospect of the coming of the Day of the Lord should not fill us with dread.

There are yet other reasons not to dread that coming day of the Lord. Paul comes up with his own images to describe the day of the Lord's second coming. While alarming, it should not fill us with fear. Paul talks about the suddenness of the coming of the day of the Lord as labor pains or a thief in the night. But we, Paul says, are children of light – we do not belong to the darkness. We trust in Jesus, who took the risk of leaving God's side to be at our side. We trust in Jesus, who was buried, but for whom that was not the end of the story. For the Lord is Jesus' refuge and the Lord is our refuge – that same Lord who destined us for salvation. Amen