



*The real meaning of faith is:
openness,
perseverance in wakefulness,
commitment to the pilgrimage.*

—John Main

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 15 NOVEMBER 2020

Opening Sentences—Psalm 123:2

As the eyes of servants
look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maid
to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to God,
for there is mercy forevermore.

Opening Prayer

Source of all goodness:
I reach out to you in hope
for it is from hearts overflowing with trust and love
that true and honest prayer arises.

So, then, increase my longing, O God,
do not satiate but increase it.
Make me reach and stretch and search
for your mysterious, ineffable presence
deep within and flowing through all things.

May I get a sense of your Spirit
with me now,
reaching out to me with mercy
emboldening me with faith and courage
for love's sake.

Amen

Scripture Reading—Matthew 25:14–30

Today we receive the second parable from Matthew's trilogy in his twenty-fifth chapter. Jesus and the disciples have entered Jerusalem for the Passover celebration amidst plots to kill him. The Gospel's tone turns ominous and urgent. Jesus' teachings and parables are eschatological in nature, speaking of the fulness of time. His audience is the disciples, the crowds have retreated for now.

Twentieth century Swiss theologian Raymund Schwager notes the tone of these weeks and says: "Jesus' call to conversion is consequently not first of all about better obedience to one or the other commandment, but about the choice between two visions of the whole of reality and between two basic ways of behaving."

Once again, the parable has some challenging edges to it. It can be helpful to keep in mind that a talent is worth more than fifteen years' wages for a labourer in this day. What might this suggest to us about the nature of the landowner who entrusted his slaves with such abundance?

*With this in mind, read slowly the parable. Ask yourself: **How is this good news for me today?***

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then 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." His 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." And 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." His

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." Then 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; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But 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? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Going Deeper

As you contemplate the parable of the slaves and the talents, where do you hear good news for yourself today?

In speaking about the challenge this parable poses to modern ears, James Alison observes:

The problem of the servant who received one talent and went and buried it is not its lack of yield, but how he imagined that his master would treat him. ...One who imagines his master is free, audacious, generous, and so on, takes risks, and himself enters into a fruitfulness that is ever richer and more effervescently creative; while one whose imagination is bound by the supposed hardness of the master lives in function of that binding of the imagination, and remains tied, hand and foot, in a continuous, and may be even an eternal, frustration.

- When are you most like the first two servants in the parable, able to take risks for the sake of love?
- What view of God or religious experiences inhibits your courageous loving?
- What prayer do you have for yourself at this time?

“To have faith does not primarily mean believing something, but rather believing in someone. Faith is trust. It takes courage to trust. The opposite of faith is not disbelief, but distrust, fear...faith is the courage to respond gratefully to every given situation, out of trust in the Giver.”

—David Steindl-Rast



Silent Meditation

How to meditate—from the World Community for Christian Meditation

To meditate, sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer-phrase, “Ma-ra-na-tha.” Say it as four syllables of equal length.

Listen to it as you say it, gently but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything—spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so keep returning simply to saying the word.

Prayers of Intercession

Merciful God, you entrust us with life and being and set us free to love in the world. We confess it is not always easy to be people of great courage and bold imagination. So, open our hearts to all that you have created, fill us with your Spirit, enable us to follow Jesus' way of self-giving, risk taking love.

Help us to love as you love.

We bring to mind our investments of time, energy and resources. Keep us from getting caught up in the transient and often shallow values of our culture. Instil in us a vision for your heaven on earth that we might be enthusiastic for its coming more and more into our lives and into your church.

Help us to love as you love.

We pray for those who are struggling at this time—for those who are ill, anxious or depressed, those whose relationships are strained, those who are challenged by addictions, oppressed by poverty, downcast in spirit for whatever reason.

Help us to love as you love.

We hold in your merciful love those who are on our minds this day...

Disciples' Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Blessing

A poem by Rainer Maria Rilke begins:

*I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.*

May we rise from our prayer emboldened by God's love for us
and trusting in Christ's Spirit to lead us into fulness of life.