

24th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 28 – Year A – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony - 11.15.20
Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18, Psalm 90: 1-12, 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11, Matthew 25: 14-30

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. So begins the familiar story of three slaves, one master and a number of talents. Talents were units of money, actually quite large sums of money. The master in going away has given into the hands of three of his slaves most of his wealth, with no restrictions and no supervision. They are free to do what they think best until the masters return when accounts will be settled. On the surface a pretty straight forward set of circumstances. Or the circumstances would be straight forward if this were a story about economic transactions. It is not. This is a story about investment. The investment of God in each one of us and how we invest the time and skill we have available to us. It is a story about what we do with the gift of life we have been given and what return we are able to make to God. Like all good stories this one has a moral, a rather unfair and harsh moral on the surface. "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." This doesn't sound like what we think we know of God and of Jesus. It doesn't seem "fair", that the one who has much gets more and the one who has little loses even that little. Fair or not, as we look around this does seem to be what often happens.

But remember, this isn't a story about economics, or about what we are able to accumulate. It is a story about investment, the investment of God in each human being and the return that we render of that investment. What this parable seeks to have us think about is how we live our lives each day.

Think of the talents not as units of large sums of money, think of them as the grace that God freely gives to us. That grace, is ours to accept and build upon or to reject. The choice is ours. What is essential is not that one got five talents, another got two and a third only one. The number of talents received is not as important as what happens next. The slaves, in this case you and I, are entrusted with what God has created and what God loves. We are encouraged to use what we have been given to the fullest extent, returning to God 100% on God's investment in us. But the catch is that it is necessary that we accept the gift of grace and use what we have been given to create more grace in the world around us. Like the first two slaves, God will say to us well done, good and faithful servant, because when used to create good in the world, grace multiplies. If we bury the grace we have been given, refusing to engage in creating more, simply burying who we are and what we have been given, the amount of grace in the world contracts. When we bury some part of ourselves, that part withers and begins to die.

There are many voices competing for our attention, for the investment of our talents in the creation of a better time and place. We hear voices that predict a dark and dangerous winter in many facets of our lives. And there are also voices of hope. We hear both the despair of the rise in COVID cases and the hope of one or more vaccines. We hear of the threat of recession and at the same time voices of courage to begin to rebuild not only our economy but our lives. There is the hazard of political and social division and the blessing of renewed spirit and unity of purpose. So many competing voices. But the one voice in all the others to which we are called to respond is the voice of God in all of this. We are to be called good and faithful servants and so we must once again gather the grace, the talents that are ours and invest them in creating new life. In this way the blessings we have will be expanded, and to those who have much more will be given.

All well and good you may say but what does that mean for St. Augustine's specifically. It means, I believe that we prepare in the dark winter to welcome the spring to come. There are seeds which if planted now will germinate into good fruit for the future. We work together to adequately address our budget and the financial needs of the community. We talk and listen to one another thoughtfully and carefully to gather information for an accurate and hopeful profile and we pray for and support one another during this time of transition, confident that God has a way forward for us. We actively think about the years ahead with new clergy leadership to be ready to re-define the mission and vision of St. Augustine's. There is work to be done, dreams to be dreamed and hope to be fulfilled. In this way the promise of the gospel will be realized. For to all of us who have much, more will be given, and we will have great abundance; and a future blessed by God.