

THE TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
NOVEMBER 15, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Take My Life and Let it Be* Setting: Wilbur Held

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #784 *Take My Life and Let it Be*

- 1 **Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.**

- 2 **Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee,
Swift and beautiful for Thee.**

- 3 **Take my voice and let me sing
Always, only for my King;
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee,
Filled with messages from Thee.**

- 4 **Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect and use
Ev'ry pow'r as Thou shalt choose,
Ev'ry pow'r as Thou shalt choose.**

- 5 **Take my will and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne,
It shall be Thy royal throne.**

- 6 **Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee,
Ever, only, all for Thee.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?
But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.

Since we are gathered to hear God's Word and call upon Him in prayer and praise, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

(Silence for reflection and self-examination)

Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Almighty God, merciful Father, in Holy Baptism You declared us to be Your children and gathered us into Your one, holy Church, in which You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

For the gift of divine peace and of pardon, with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord:

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

**1 To God on high be glory
And peace to all the earth;
Goodwill from God in heaven
Proclaimed at Jesus' birth!
We praise and bless You, Father;
Your holy name, we sing—
Our thanks for Your great glory,
Lord God, our heav'nly King.**

**2 To You, O sole-begotten,
The Father's Son, we pray;
O Lamb of God, our Savior,
You take our sins away.
Have mercy on us, Jesus;
Receive our heartfelt cry,
Where You in pow'r are seated
At God's right hand on high—**

**3 For You alone are holy;
You only are the Lord.
Forever and forever,
Be worshiped and adored;
You with the Holy Spirit
Alone are Lord Most High,
In God the Father's glory.
"Amen!" our glad reply.**

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty and ever-living God,

You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. Dispel from us the works of darkness and grant us to live in the light of Your Son, Jesus Christ, that our faith may never be found wanting; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Zephaniah 1:7–16

Be silent before the Lord GOD!
For the day of the LORD is near;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice
and consecrated his guests.
And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice—
"I will punish the officials and the king's sons
and all who array themselves in foreign attire.
On that day I will punish
everyone who leaps over the threshold,
and those who fill their master's house
with violence and fraud.
"On that day," declares the LORD,
"a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate,
a wail from the Second Quarter,
a loud crash from the hills.
Wail, O inhabitants of the Mortar!
For all the traders are no more;
all who weigh out silver are cut off.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the men
who are complacent,
those who say in their hearts,
'The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do ill.'
Their goods shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them."
The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter;
the mighty man cries aloud there.
A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 90:1–12

Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You return man to dust
and say, "Return, O children of man!"
For a thousand years in your sight
are but as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night.

You sweep them away as with a flood;
they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning:
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

For we are brought to an end by your anger;
by your wrath we are dismayed.

You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your presence.

For all our days pass away under your wrath;
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

The years of our life are seventy,
or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span is but toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Who considers the power of your anger,
and your wrath according to the fear of you?

So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL Matthew 25:14–30

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 25th chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he

who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.
Dear friends in Christ:

One of the things I've realized over many years of considering this well-known parable of Jesus is that we need to take our time with its opening words. Too often when hearing the parables, we are in a hurry to discover the main point or find out how the story ends. The opening words not only set the stage for the parable, but also convey critical messages we shouldn't miss.

Jesus begins by saying: "for it will be." "It" here refers to the kingdom of heaven, as stated in the previous parable. The kingdom is where God is acting to further his causes in the world. Today's parable will tell us more about what God is doing among us now and what he will be doing in the future.

Jesus states that the kingdom will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. We see right away that the kingdom has a central character – one who is wealthy and powerful, having servants and going on journeys.

Jesus has told other parables in which there is a person like this. And normally that person represents God. But in his last teachings, Jesus has been speaking about himself. He's referred to himself as the Son of Man who will soon arrive and the bridegroom who will soon join his bride. Jesus also tells of himself in the reading which follows ours today. In that reading, the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne and judge the nations. We see, therefore, that in these parables Jesus is putting himself in the place of God, giving us important clues for understanding his true identity.

In today's parable, the man takes a journey. We know that Jesus, too, would soon be taking a journey. He would leave this world in death, be resurrected to life, and return to the Father by ascending into heaven.

And, just like the man in the parable, Jesus would also return from his journey someday. In that day, which is yet to come, Jesus will pronounce judgment on all people – just as he does with the three servants in the parable – and usher in the promised new age.

In the parable, the man prepares for his journey by calling his servants. Jesus, too, has servants. And we should think about who these servants are and what this parable tells us about being a servant of Jesus.

Jesus' servants are his disciples – those who follow him in faith. They are the ones who have been called by Jesus and willingly respond. You and I, therefore – who are gathered here today to worship him and learn from him – are Jesus' servants.

To be a servant of Jesus means that we have received the blessing of employment. Jesus has put us to work in his kingdom – and it is good work! We know the joy of being useful. We know the joy of helping others and making a difference.

What's more, as servants of Jesus we have a place in his household. We live under our master's protection and care. That's the way it worked in Jesus' day, and that's the way it works in the kingdom too. To be a servant of Jesus means we are a part of his family. And when we are a part of his family, we are saved – saved from all that could hurt us, including our sin. We are saved because we belong to Jesus.

Furthermore, as this parable makes clear, we servants of Jesus are extended trust and opportunity. We have a calling – one given by our master. The calling is to take what God has entrusted to us and use it for his purposes. The calling is greater than simply serving at its most basic level. The calling is to be a steward, or manager, of what God places in our hands.

In the parable, the master placed talents in his servant's hands. One servant got five talents. Another got two. And another got one. A talent was a unit of money – a very large unit, perhaps a quarter of a million dollars in today's valuing.

When the master returned from his journey, he found that two of the servants had invested their large amount of money and got a good return. These servants the master commended.

But the other servant had made no efforts with his money. And this servant the master condemned.

And now we are ready for the main point of the parable. The main point is that we, the servants of Jesus, should be bold in using what our master gives us. We are not to be afraid. Nor are we to be lazy. Jesus has entrusted us with many good things. We are to use them, not hide them.

Over the course of two thousand years of Christian history, the word "talent" came to be known less as a unit of money and more as an ability. The change in language most likely came about because of this parable. We now talk about our talents and mean the things we're good at.

This parable does push us to use our talents and abilities for God's purposes. But the idea of investing what God has given is even bigger than this.

Our church often uses the categories of time, talents and treasures – treasures being money. This is a fuller way to think about what God gives. We note that God gives each of these to us, and that he gives in abundance – with the exact amount given according to his wisdom and good pleasure.

Knowing that we have these gifts, our next step is to think about investing them. To invest our gifts means to use them in Godly ways.

Some of our gifts will need to be used to invest in ourselves. We all have needs, and investments in ourselves can result in greater returns.

But we also have a calling to invest our gifts in others. There are other people who need our gifts. And we need the gifts of others. The greatest returns come, in fact, when gifts are shared.

In our parable today, the rich man invested in his servants by giving them opportunity and trust. We can invest in others in the same way. And in many other ways too.

The parable doesn't tell us how the servants invested their gifts, but it does tell us that they took action. And to double their returns, they must have been working hard.

Our theme for today's sermon comes from their action. As Jesus teaches, this is a time to be bold. We are to be bold in using his gifts, for he will return someday soon and demand an accounting from us.

Regarding our boldness, the Bible teaches us to give generously and sacrificially. And it teaches us to give the tithe – ten percent of our income toward the work of spreading God's Word. God's Word will always have the greatest and best impact in our world, for it teaches the way of holiness and proclaims God's grace and the forgiveness of sins.

We tend to think of the tithe as a monetary gift only. But we should also see it as a call to give of our time and talents. The Lord's work of Gospel proclamation needs our efforts, not just our money. God's people should make plans to serve through the church.

Likewise, ten percent is a good guide for our church offering, but stewardship is really thinking in terms of one hundred percent given to God. We are to give our all to God for the furthering of his good purposes.

When we give of our time, talent and treasure to purposes other than those which are pleasing to God, we are not acting as his good servants. And let's face it, we all do this. We all have times when we support that which is frivolous and meaningless at best, and harmful at worst.

These are the times when we sin. These are the times when we act in ways that lead us and others away from God. We sin by what we do. And we sin by what we leave undone.

And that leads us to the servant in the parable who buried his talent in the ground.

The master of the servant called him lazy. "Slothful" in our translation. The master condemned the man's inaction. It wasn't enough for him to simply preserve what he had been given.

And note that the master also called him wicked. "Evil" is the most direct translation. The servant was evil because of how he felt about his master. He resented him and didn't think well of him – believing him to be hard, dishonest and a cheat. The servant said he was frightened by the master. But that was just to invoke sympathy from him. If he was really afraid and knew for certain that the master was a cheat, he would have done something with that money. The master knew what was really going on. The servant had no respect for him and refused to work for him. And because of that, he was banished from the household.

As we read the parable today and think about that servant who buried his talent, we are tempted to extend sympathy to him. We feel bad for anyone who says they are afraid. And we already felt bad that he received less talents than the others.

But that is not how we are to see the situation. Although some sympathy is always appropriate, the situation here calls above all for wisdom and understanding. We are not to excuse the sin. God has expectations of his servants and these are to be followed. To refuse out of resentment is a great evil.

The other reason we feel sympathy is because we know we are sinful too. There are times when each of us is timid and lazy. And there are even times when we feel a little resentment toward God our master.

In those times we are called to repent in faith. And when we repent, God will forgive us our sin for the sake of his Son Jesus.

What we dare not do is bury the greatest gift we have been given – our faith.

To the two servants in the parable who invested their gifts, the master said: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” What beautiful words those are.

The wording of the phrase implies that Jesus is referring to the joy of heaven. And so he is. But Jesus also has in mind the joy of this life. We recall that he once said to his disciples: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). There is always joy to be found when we live according to the teachings and promises of the kingdom. The joy of our master comes from our relationship to him, where we work according to his calling and live in his household.

In our waiting for the Lord’s return, and in our stewardship of his gifts, this is a time to be wise and a time to be bold. May God lead us to joyfully give as he has given to us – doing so wisely and boldly, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #856 O Christ, Who Called the Twelve

- 1 O Christ, who called the Twelve**
To rise and follow You,
Forsaking old, familiar ways
For ventures bold and new:
Grant us to hear Your call
To risk security
And, bound in heart and will to You,
Find perfect liberty.
- 2 O Christ, who taught the Twelve**
The truth for ages sealed,
Whose words and works awakened faith,
The ways of God revealed:
Instruct us now, we pray,
By Your empow’ring Word.
True teacher, be for all who seek
Their light, their life, their Lord.
- 3 O Christ, who led the Twelve**
Among the desolate
And broke as bread of life for all
Your love compassionate:
Lead us along the ways
Where hope has nearly died
And help us climb the lonely hills
Where love is crucified.

- 4 O Christ, who sent the Twelve
On roads they'd never trod
To serve, to suffer, teach, proclaim
The nearer reign of God:
Send us on ways where faith
Transcends timidity,
Where love informs and hope sustains
Both life and ministry.
- 5 O Christ, the apostles' Lord,
The martyrs' strength and song,
The crucified and risen King
To whom the saints belong:
Though generations pass,
Our tribute still we bring,
Our hymns a sacrifice of praise,
Our lives an offering.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING O Christ, Who Called the Twelve Setting: Jacob Weber

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Almighty God, everlasting Father, You are worthy of being praised for all Your gifts and graces. In your mercy, hear us this day as we cry to You on behalf of ourselves and all who are in need.

O Lord, You have made us Your people and preserved us through the ministry of Your Word and Sacraments. Continue to pour out upon us grace upon grace, that we may be kept in faith and guarded in hope. Make Your Church throughout the world one in doctrine, confession and life, and give to Your Church faithful workers who will serve you with conviction. Deliver us from confusion and error by the power of Your Holy Spirit and raise up those who will continue to serve in faithfulness and humility.

Deliver the nations from oppression and from ungodly rulers and governments. Bless all in authority within our own nation, that righteousness may flourish and injustice end. And bless all places of teaching and learning with Your Holy Spirit, that our children may honor You, walk in Your commands, and show forth in their lives the fruits of the Spirit.

Prevent all disaster and calamity, deliver us from war and violence, and spare us from pestilence. Bless all noble occupations, all Godly endeavors, and help the arts to flourish so that our lives may be enriched by beauty. Help us to know and rejoice in the good fruits of the earth and to receive them with thanksgiving.

Give to the sick healing, to the suffering relief, to the grieving hope and to the dying peace. Hear us especially on behalf of those who have requested our prayers [especially _____]. Sustain us in the day of trial, deliver us from all our enemies of body and soul, and keep us steadfast in the day of trouble.

Give unity to Your people, that we may not be divided in doctrine or witness. And grant us grace, that we may soon come to the Lord's table and receive there the body and blood of our Lord Jesus in sincere repentance and faith.

Receive with our song of praise and thanksgiving the tithes and offerings we bring, that through good use of time, talents and treasures Your name may be glorified in all we are and do.

Remembering that here we have no abiding city but that heaven is our home, give us Your aid so that we may by true faith and godly living prepare for the coming of our Savior, doing the works You have called us to do and accomplishing Your purpose in our daily lives. Help us to multiply Your mercy by loving our neighbor in need and loving You with all our body, soul, strength and will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #803 Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee

**1 Joyful, joyful we adore Thee,
God of glory, Lord of love!
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before Thee,
Praising Thee, their sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
Drive the gloom of doubt away.
Giver of immortal gladness,
Fill us with the light of day.**

- 2 All Thy works with joy surround Thee,
Earth and heav'n reflect Thy rays,
Stars and angels sing around Thee,
Center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
Flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird, and flowing fountain
Call us to rejoice in Thee.
- 3 Thou art giving and forgiving,
Ever blessing, ever blest,
Wellspring of the joy of living,
Ocean-depth of happy rest!
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Fountainhead of love divine:
Joyful, we Thy heav'n inherit!
Joyful, we by grace are Thine!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee* Setting: Paul Manz

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