

It's been a long time, hasn't it? We're just one week short of eight months since we have been together here, in this place, gathered at this hour. Yet throughout all that time, we were gathered by the weekly video and worship materials put up on YouTube and as we mailed out the sermon and bulletin to those who don't have computer access. And we all thank Cso and Julie for their dedication to the task of producing the video and the joys & concerns piece that took hours of their time each week to put together. And thanks to Vicki for being the tech on the organ and all our liturgists, and Norm and Kathy who contributed the prayers. And thanks to everyone who sent pictures and material to Julie each week. Joys and concerns was a treasured discovery that transformed our lives across all these months.

We all came together and did something we never imagined we would have to do when we came to worship on March 22nd! Life here at church changed in an instant after that service, and thanks be to God, we all found we could meet the challenges and find other ways to be the church—*be the Body of Christ in this place!* We found other ways to do worship and be in fellowship and continue to support the life and the work of this church.

And even though we have opened the doors again on a Sunday morning, we know our life together is not going to be what we want it to be, that it is *still full of challenges*. This pandemic is far from being over. But we also know, we people of faith, that *God is with us* and will continue *to provide a way to lead us along through* the days and weeks and months ahead. We're all in the same boat, this whole world is in that "boat," of *having to wait*, until this disease comes under control and lets go of our lives.

Turning to our text this morning, we just read the story about what three slaves did while they waited for their wealthy master to return. This is the second in a series of three parables Jesus told his disciples after they had pumped him for facts about the end of time and his second coming. His disciples hoped to learn that bit of “inside” information about future events they were sure were imminent and would impact their lives! True to form, the parables Jesus gave as his answer to them raised more dust than it settled! But there were some teachings basic to every disciple’s life that Christ emphasized as he told each tale.

In our text today, we have a “master” who was a very rich man, and his three slaves to whom he entrusted his money, those eight *talents*. A talent was a valuable chunk of change, each being worth *fifteen years of wages!* The master put *one hundred twenty years’ worth of wages* into the hands of his slaves, and then just *walked away*—left them with no supervision or instructions or declared expectations!

Each slave had an incredible amount of money. Each held the absolute trust of their master. Each had a responsibility handed to them. Each was free to do whatever they wanted to with that money while they waited for their master’s return. Each slave made their own individual response to their master’s trust. In the end, their response *reflected the trust each slave had in their master!*

Two of the slaves invested the money they had been given. They both took advantage of financial opportunities that arose, and managed to double the value of what they each had been given! The other slave took the money given to him and dug a hole and buried it—hid it away to keep it safe. He would be certain to return to his master every bit of what had been given to him.

A long time passed before the master returned to *settle accounts* with his three slaves. He was pleased with the two slaves who had doubled his money. He commended each one, pronounced them to be “good” and worthy of trust, and to each he gave even more responsibility over his estate. And then the master reached across the great barrier that existed between him and those slaves and *welcomed them into his life*, into the pure, unfettered *joy* life would be *in relationship with him!*

But things did not go as well for the third slave. He handed his master the money he had been given—not a penny less, not a penny more, certain of his good judgment to bury it and keep it safe, because he *knew his master was a harsh and exacting man*. The best thing he could do with what had been entrusted to him was *to protect himself* by protecting the money his master had given him. The master was not pleased with this slave. He rebuked him for his self-serving view of life and banished him from his presence, sending him off into that teeth-gnashing place of outer darkness!

We have waited across the expanse of nearly eight long months for this chance to come back together in worship. And while we waited, we stepped out in faith, and found new ways to keep our lives connected—with one another and with God—and with that shared *community-of-faith-sense-of-God*. We did not dig a hole and bury what we had, trying to keep the traditions and rituals safe. It cannot be done that way if we truly trust in God’s will for our lives and that Divine “will” is the everlasting call to *share the “abundance” that God’s gift of faith* brings to us.

We cannot dig a hole and hold on to what we have--not a single one of us, not as the Body of Christ. We cannot hide away the

gift of faith God has given to us. We are not called to be self-serving, sheltered disciples of Christ. We are not drawn together by the Spirit to be a “self-serving” church. Christ calls us to share what we have with others—to give ourselves to others—*freely give away* to the “good” of another, put our effort into “investing” that bit of God’s “good” *in the life of another human being with care and respect.*

We are walking into new territory—new ways of worship, new ways of being the people of God in this place—this God who is trusting and welcoming and generous beyond all measure, this God who has given us each, and as we are assembled together, *all we will ever need* to be faithful—this God who is sending us out into another week with *all we will ever need* to be welcoming and generous to others—this One, who has given us *all we will ever need* to *travel this way together in the hope and joy of life kept by God!* Thanks be to God.....*Amen!*

“we cannot keep for ourselves, what God has so generously given”
Matthew 25:14–30 111520 Mkh

