

Sermon November 19, 2017 Expectations Cara B. Hochhalter

Psalm 139:1-18 and Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus has been in the news lately. Even locally. Did you see that the original person who played Jesus in the movie, *Jesus Christ Superstar*...he's 75 now....was in Greenfield? I really wanted to see him but it was a busy day yesterday!

Did you also hear about a portrait of Jesus, by Leonardo da Vinci painted in the 1500s...and rediscovered in 2005, was sold at Christie's Auction house in New York City...for 450.3 million dollars! This is the most a piece of art has ever been sold for.... Jesus. Imagine what Jesus would say...someone bought his picture for THAT much money? What would Jesus have done with that much money...feed the poor, release captives from prison....take care of widows and orphans?

Did you see the painting on TV? It is a very Italian Renaissance image of Jesus with a blue robe and soft light brown hair in ringlets...his face seems soft, almost feminine. In one hand he holds a transparent globe representing the world. Beautifully painted, the title is, "Salvator Mundi" or Savior of the World.

But it is Jesus' right hand that drew my attention. While the rest of the painting seems slightly out of focus... his right hand is very clearly IN focus and well-lit. It is held up in the sign of "blessing."....like this..... Now we are familiar with different hand signals....this means "I love you." This means "Peace".....This mean "Stop"....there are some others.... But how many of you know the one for "Blessing?" You can see it in other paintings of Jesus...there he is blessing the world...blessing us...blessing children...blessing all of creation. It is interesting to me that in this painting by da Vinci, the hand that blesses is clearly in focus!

Let us be in prayer: God who blesses us all, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So we're going to grapple with a parable that Jesus told...about "talents."

The beautiful thing about the parables is that most often, the Bible does not tell us what they mean...Jesus did not teach that way. For a couple thousand years, people have questioned and even argued about why a parable was told and what on earth, it has to do with us today...

Here is the parable: A master was going away and gave exorbitant amounts of money to three of his servants to "keep"...invest...store...while he was gone. To the first he gave 5 talents, which was the equivalent of 15 years of average wage at that time; to the second 2 talents and the third, he gave only 1. The first and second both took their master's money and traded it, invested it, spent it in ways that made it multiply. But the third servant was afraid....so he buried his share in the ground.

The ones who invested and "grew" their money were praised when the master returned. "Well done, good and faithful servants."

But listen to what the third servant says. "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." And he handed him back the same amount that he had been given.

The master was furious, calling him wicked and lazy.

Now, as you can imagine, there are different interpretations of this parable. What do you think? Who deserved praise, the ones who invested the money in the system or the one who buried it in the ground for safe-keeping.

A Biblical scholar, William Herzog, calls the third servant the hero! He calls him a whistle-blower in a system where the master made money off the backs of others...became rich at the expense of the poor...and so this one servant, in defiance, rightfully rebelled and hid the money in the ground.

Herzog suggests this whistle-blower servant took the money out of circulation so that it could not be used to "dispossess more peasants from their lands through its dispersion in the form of usurious loans." He refuses to participate in a system through which his mean master has gained power! Something to think about in our own times!

Some of you may know people who will not invest in banks and hide their money under their mattresses... Perhaps they lived through the big Depression and fear a collapse of the banking system...or they do not want their money to be used in programs that take advantage of others....there is such a thing as socially responsible investing....like in churches, for example, who do good work!

Probably Jesus was not really talking about money...I think we might step back and look a little more broadly at this parable. Perhaps Jesus was speaking about the value of not hoarding what we are given....of course we do not need to be part of a

system that makes money at the expense of others...but that being stingy and burying our gifts, keeping them out of circulation, limits the fullness of life as God might dream of it.

Perhaps Jesus was talking about not squandering the personal talents and gifts that each person has. If you can sing, but never sing in a choir; if you can teach but never offer to share what you know; if you are an artist but hide this talent; if you are a healer but never offer to help others; if you can cook but never invite anyone over for a meal. You get the idea! Do we squander our gifts...do we help each other to recognize the gifts that they have??

There was an "expectation" that these servants would invest their gifts wisely. Is there an expectation that we use our gifts and talents for the good of others? I just read about a young man from Kenya who used his creativity to invent a solar powered light that flashes. It seems that prowling lions see these lights as someone being there and so they no longer eat the villagers' cows!

You all have creative imagination that could be used for the betterment of life, whether close at home or in the world....the third servant was ridiculed for being timid and overly cautious...perhaps we need to take more risks and not hold back.

One gift we have all been blessed with is the gift to love...to forgive...to nurture...one another. What if we were all to bury that gift...to hoard our love for humankind...and for creation as well. Being part of this incredible ecosystem of all life...how can we not reciprocate through our gratitude and generosity?

Kathryn Matthews says this is "stewardship of the gospel itself"...taking care of the good news of Christ's abundant and life-affirming love by sharing it with others!

She asks if we let this faith color our whole lives, being transformed by *living out* our baptism, by responding to God's yearning for us to live with compassion in relationship with others? Or do we play it too safe, wondering what others will think...can we be risk-takers and live this kind of faith boldly?

For this Thanksgiving Sunday...I want to close with something called the Thanksgiving Address...Some of you were here last week when I shared what I learned from a Native American woman and botanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer. She says that all Native peoples all over the world share a culture of gratitude....

This Thanksgiving Address is spoken with much more elaboration but I am just going to summarize it...first thanks is given for the faces around us as we seek to

become one. Thanks for Mother Earth and all she provides. Thanks for water, for fish, for fields of plant-life and the foods they offer. Thanks for herbs and their medicine, for trees, for animals and for birds. Thanks for the winds and the four seasons. Thanks for thunder and lightening, for stars, the moon and sun. Thanks for enlightened teachers. And the last which is surely a prayer; "We now turn our thoughts to the Creator, or Great Spirit, [or God], and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator."

May we also be a people of gratitude...for babies and baptisms, for our living and challenging faith, for our church and our community...Let us love and share that which we have been given. Amen.