

**ST. CHRISTOPHER'S CHURCH
COBLESKILL NY**

November 13, 2011 – PENTECOST 22A / PROPER 28

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker, FHC

Sermon: “*Risking all for God*”

Zephaniah 1:7,12-18	(A prophecy of the Day of Judgment)
Psalm 90:1-12	(God has been and will be our refuge forever)
1 Thessalonians 5:1-10	(God destined us for salvation)
St. Matthew 25:14-15, 19-29	(Jesus’ parable of the talents)

As we near the end of the Church Year, the lectionary has been focusing on the final judgment and the proper use of our time and the gifts God has give us, until Christ returns. Jesus’ Parable of the Talents is the third in a series of parables in Matthew that address how we are to prepare for the Son of Man—as Jesus referred to Himself—who will come again at an unknown time. That is why Jesus describes the landowner as a man who went away on an extended journey, entrusting his property to his servants. So what did the servants do, in their master’s absence?

The first two doubled the money they were given, through trading and investing it, while the third dug a hole and hid what he had been allotted. When the landowner returned to settle his accounts, he praised the first two servants, commending their enterprise and trustworthiness. These servants had taken some risks and skillfully managed what they were given. Although the third slave was honest, and did not *squander* his master’s money, he is accused of being wicked and lazy.¹

The third servant was like the miser who hid his gold at the foot of a tree in his garden. Every week, he would dig it up and look at it for hours, then bury it again. One day, a thief dug up the gold and made off with it. When the miser next came to gaze upon his treasure, all he found was an empty hole. The man began to howl with grief, so his neighbors came running to find out what the trouble was. When they did, one asked, “Did you ever use any of the gold?” “No,” said the miser, “I only looked at it every week.” “Well then,” said the neighbor, “for all the good the gold did you, you might just as well come every week and gaze upon the hole.”²

This story, along with Jesus’ parable, are sad commentaries on those who are unwilling to take risks with the resources God has given them—not only our money, but also our faith and works. The master was so displeased, he took away from the fearful servant what little he had been given. Even worse, Jesus says, the man was “thrown into outer darkness,” a common biblical metaphor for hell.

Has Jesus no sympathy for fear, or weakness, or lack of ability? After all, prudence, thrift, and the desire for security are necessary aspects of a reasonable life. However, these are not the values of God’s Kingdom. For the servant who treats his gift as something to hoard, selfish defensiveness overrules all other considerations. But Christ teaches that the reign of God is like *finding* a treasure in a field, not *burying it* in one. The one who is zealous for the kingdom risks everything to buy that field so he can unearth the treasure and enjoy it (see Matt. 13:44).

A vital and growing relationship with God—a faith that is deepening and expanding—means daring to take some risks. It means surrendering ourselves, and all of our values and priorities, to the will of God, as we open ourselves to being led by His Holy Spirit.

And frankly, it also means not being stingy with our money. If we seek to truly obey God, we will tithe the 10 percent the Bible requires—or at least aim for that as a goal. And we will give sacrificially to those who have less than we do.

We can afford to give away more and more of our love, kindness, caring, prayers, and resources because the closer we get to God, the more of His grace we will experience. We come to see life from a more gracious, generous perspective, as God’s perfect love casts out the fear that had been clenching us into hoarders of God’s gifts. As we begin to grasp that we are surrounded by, and filled with, God’s love, we can more freely envision possibilities for growth.³

God’s call upon our life asks that we take the kinds of risks that must accompany growth. Rather than always living safely, never stepping outside of our comfort-zones, we are to risk believing in all that God can do, and acting in ways that reflect our trust in His power and love. We are to be good stewards not only of the material things God has given us, but also of the Gospel, by proclaiming the Good News through how we live—not by hiding it away. Jesus promises that our reward will be everlasting joy, that is, eternity in heaven.⁴

In fact, Jesus says, “to all those who have”—that is, who have been entrusted with God’s gifts and risk stepping out in faith to use them—“more will be given.” Think about it. Isn’t it true that the more you make an effort to pray, the more you find you can pray? The more you come to church, the easier it gets to make it a regular habit? The more you try to talk to others about what God is doing in your life, the more you want to? The more you donate to others, the more you want to give away.

God gives all of us resources. To some, God gives special talents or spiritual gifts. To others, God grants wealth and abundance. Everyone receives *something* from God. For those who are not blessed with talent or material resources, God gives His grace. Each of us has the love of God within us; at the very least, we can give that away!⁵

As we begin to live more and more out of a sense of giftedness or blessing, our awareness of God’s grace will grow. And with that will come increased joy, as we offer ourselves to God’s service, dedicating our lives to the care and redemption of all God has made.

The great Renaissance artist Michelangelo (1475-1564) once said, “The great danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high, and we miss it, but that it is too low, and we reach it.”

Whatever we do, we are to make it an offering unto God. When that is our primary purpose—regardless of our work, vocation, or ministry—then the Parable of the Talents will come true. In the end, the return of the Master will be all that matters, not our net worth. When Jesus is our top priority, we will indeed enter into the joy of our Lord.

Let us pray:

Loving God, we thank You for Your boundless grace that makes it possible for us to both act responsibly and at the same time, step out in faith farther than we ever have before, willing to risk our selfishness and fear for the joy of being part of Your kingdom. Amen, come, Lord Jesus, come!

¹ Adapt. Donald S. Armentrout, “Investing in the Kingdom,” *Synthesis, Year A: Proper 28* (13 November 2011), p. 1

² Adapt. Anthony de Mello, SJ, *The Heart of the Enlightened*, qtd. Keith Wagner, *Synthesis, Year A: Proper 28* (13 November 2011), p. 2.

³ Adapt. Armentrout, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴ Adapt. Armentrout, *op. cit.*, p. 1

⁵ Adapt. Keith Wagner, *Synthesis, Year A: Proper 28* (13 November 2011), p. 2.