

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh  
November 19, 2017- 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost- 28A  
Given at St. Andrew's Church, Kent, CT

**Zephaniah 1.7, 12-18; Psalm 90: 1-12; 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11; Matthew 25. 14-30**

**‘Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.’ †**

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Once again, our Scriptures foretell sorrow and darkness... the prophet Zephaniah continues the warning we heard from Amos last week about the coming Day of Judgment... and the Psalmist speaks of the weariness this mortal life. Despite the fact that Christmas is quickly approaching, we are drawn to a place that seems far from such comforting scenes as a country church sitting in the midst of snow-covered fields and emitting a lovely glow through stained-glass windows. Instead, our Scriptures seem dark and discouraging.

Again we hear another parable from Matthew's Gospel that seems very harsh. This comes from the same Gospel that begins with a wondrous story of the infant born in a stable, identified by the bright light of a great star... the fulfillment of a promise of salvation. And today, instead of reassurance, Jesus warns 'those who have, more will be given... but to those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.' In the past few weeks, we've heard stories of exclusion from wedding feasts and of weeping and gnashing of teeth!  
... I wonder why?

The Psalmist also has us recite some sober and tough words— life 'is but labor, pain, and sorrow ... and passes quickly.' And yet notice that the passage ends on a positive note, 'teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.' That is, that we may pay attention to what really matters in life!

Last week we learned from the 5 foolish and 5 wise bridesmaids that of us all must be proactive in pursuing our God-given duties. Today's story of talents reminds us that we all have been given gifts... just as in the parable, each servant has 'received according to his abilities,' each one of us has been given gifts and responsibilities that God felt we could handle. And, God demands that we use what we have been given, not waste it, not hide it. The main point is that if we don't use the gifts we've been given, we'll lose them! Just like an ability to sing, play a musical instrument, or speak another language... without regular practice, these talents are lost.

Once again this week, we are called toward wisdom, to be wise, to 'apply our hearts to wisdom.' Jesus makes it clear, the wise way is not to sit idly by, but to develop and nurture the talents we are given by our God. It's too easy to withdraw and stay isolated, to hide from others, to stay quiet and passive from fear. It's easier and seems safer to keep quiet, especially in our present social environment where any sense of disagreement is sure to end in conflict.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of my favorite theologians, once made the comment: 'The great sin of respectable people in society is... running away from responsibility.' For him, the heart of the Nazi's horrible success in German society, stemmed from many Christians

failing to use and exercise the ‘talents’ and knowledge God gave them. I must confess that I am starting to wonder if the charge he made against Christians of his society, also applies to many of us today. Jesus’ parable messages are all about taking a positive, proactive stance; being prepared and proactive, not giving in to fear and inactivity.

On yesterday, our Bishop gave his Annual Convention address, in which he challenged all Episcopalians in CT to step-up and participate in a common spiritual journey. A journey that involves listening, discerning, and ‘trying-on’ things God may be calling us to do. Are we willing to take a chance and try something different, and possibly even fail? Remember, some of the greatest human discoveries and accomplishments came only through initial failure. Together— as a local parish, as a group of parishes within our region, and as the broader Episcopal Church throughout CT— we have the opportunity to embark on such a journey. It doesn’t start with specific goals, but by being open to the unexpected. It starts with considering how best to use the gifts we’ve been given.

Consider the parable of the talents...

What has God given you? What has The Master entrusted to you to develop and grow? And what is happening around you in this very disruptive world that might be causing fear and limit your willingness to take action?

What is it that God is calling you to do?

As we come upon the Advent season and prepare for Christmas, let’s remember it’s not just about the number of talents we’ve received, For some have received more than others, each according to their ability. It’s not the size of the gift, its what we do with what we’ve been given that is essential! Let’s pray to be willing to take risks, to speak truth to power, to stand up for justice and God’s message of love and reconciliation throughout our world! What might God be calling you to do?

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