

## ***TWENTY-FIFTH AFTER PENTECOST***

***Judges 4:1-7; Psalm 123; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30***

Some of the stories that Jesus told, were difficult stories for us to hear and understand. They were likely just as hard to hear by the group listening to them in Palestine, as they are for us sitting in the pews today. We'll leave aside the whole matter of being cast into the eternal rubbish dump and all the wailing and teeth gnashing. However, if we have sympathy for anyone in today's Gospel reading, it is probably for the poor person who was deprived of receiving a gift because he was shy, or reserved, or cautious. And surely Jesus is not telling us that a friend of ours, who has put extra cash under the mattress, is worse off than those of us who are watching our pension funds decrease in the stock market?

In His story in the Gospel reading for today, Jesus is talking about vocation and the grace given when we accept and enter into a covenant with God. What would immediately strike home to a new Christian listening to this Gospel story in the time of Jesus, would be the meaning of baptism and the ministry expected of the baptized.

To the early Christians, baptism was not merely a church ritual, something done to our little sons and daughters to which friends may be invited, who never darken the door of our church, except when friends are baptized, married or buried. Far from it.

Those Christians who were hearing this directly from Jesus, were giving their lives for God. In times of calm and peace, they probably just lost their jobs, their reputations, and even



their families, by becoming Christians. During turbulent times, they faced arrest and execution.

Nowadays, in Canada, we may be baptized without much excitement or fanfare. Unless we belong to a parish facing closure or financial problems, or unless we take seriously the statistics about declining membership and revenue in the diocesan or national church, the cost of being a Christian and an Anglican may seem minimal.

We may complain about the feuding, fussing, and fighting we witness in our church, and wish people would be quiet; but, apart from that, our pew is safe, and we are safe, and perhaps our willingness to sing those dreary hymns, or uplifting songs, and say all those prayers God seems to like, may get us eternity in heaven.

If we are honestly not too uncomfortable about this last thought, this parable is for us. Prepare for Jesus to make us uncomfortable. He has a way of doing that.

When we were baptized, we were commissioned to be witnesses of the Kingdom which is, and which is to come. The word “witness” in Greek is the same as our word “martyr.” That's a bit confusing for us, because the chance of our being martyred and ending up with a special day on the Church Calendar, or depicted in a stained-glass window, is pretty slim. Life-giving doesn't always mean dying. Those of us who are married have promised to give our lives to each other. Close friends take seriously Jesus' words that there is no greater sign of love than to be prepared to surrender everything for the beloved.

The gift of discipleship given to us in our baptism involves our being prepared to be life-givers for Jesus. We are being asked by Jesus to give ourselves up in selfless love for God and selfless love for everyone else and for this world in which we



are stewards.

The fault of the person who did not use the gift he was given was that he was entirely passive. That person was so frightened that he would lose what he had been given, that he was paralyzed by an awful fear.

You may be thinking that being passive and fearfull are opposites. However, that is not so. There's a type of fear that is serene. There's safety in doing nothing.

There are so-called inactive Christians who may even piously mutter that they do pray. However, prayer is very dangerous.

True prayer propels us into the heart of God and incites us to take on the pains and tragedies of others. "God bless Bob, and God bless Mary ..." doesn't get us very far. When we risk stepping into the penetrating love of God and into the misery of our neighbor, we step into the danger of doing something for others and thus exposing ourselves to rejection or loss.

Anglicans seem paralyzed by the Biblical word "evangelism."

We are prepared to discuss politics and even share our favourite recipes with others, but not our faith. We come up with all sorts of excuses to justify our inaction, or unwillingness to talk about our relationship with God. We act as if it's unfortunate that Jesus commanded us to go into the world and proclaim the Good News. We don't want to admit that our own Christian faith rests on past generations of people who have passed on the Gospel.

Of course we are not to force our faith on others. Of course we are not to say that we are going to heaven and they are going to hell. That is God's choice, not ours. Yet we have been given the grace to witness the faith within us to others, and that may be in giving instruction or providing shelter, and hopefully, by telling and showing the love of Jesus at one and the same time.

Each one of us, in our baptism, was given a wealth of love and



an intimate experience of the presence of God. We renew that gift at each Eucharist, as we receive Jesus into our lives and join with the hosts of heaven in worship and thanksgiving.

As we embrace the world in the Prayers of the People, we commit ourselves to embrace that same world in our daily life and work, at school, at business, and with our neighbors next door.

The warning that the gift may be taken back flies against our popular notion of God. Surely God wouldn't be so mean. But the warning comes from Jesus, so it is worth taking seriously. Perhaps every time we come to the Communion Table, we might offer a simple prayer: "Lord give me the will to be faithful and active." When we do, Jesus will speak to our hearts and minds, and tell us what he wants us to do.

**AMEN.**