

**St. Andrew's United Church (Williams Lake)**

**November 15, 2020**

**(In-Person, Zoom and email)**

**Welcome**

Welcome to the gathering of the family of Jesus. We gather on lands walked for thousands of years by people of the First Nations. We acknowledge the history, culture, and spirituality of the Secwépemc (Shuswap) People. We also honour the heritage and gifts of the Métis people. We remember our responsibility as persons who inhabit this land alongside our First Nations and Métis sisters and brothers. May we live the respect that our words offer.

In the name of Jesus, who is alive in each of us, peace to you.

**And also with you.**

We light a candle when we gather – a visible sign of God's presence. If you have a candle where you are, please join me as I light the candle.

**Hymn** – Jesus, remember me (sung at home – unaccompanied)

VU 148

Jesus, remember me when you come in-to your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come in-to your kingdom.

**Call to Worship**

We turn to the right  
and Jesus gives us a sign  
to let go of the past,  
to offer forgiveness.

We turn to the left  
and the Holy Spirit  
swirls the freshness  
of the present moment around us.

Then, we recognize God's voice behind us,  
urging us to move forward.

Come, let us follow the signs of our faith  
and breathe in the freshness of the Spirit  
as we go forward into worship.

Written by Norah Laverty.

**Gathering**, Pentecost 2 2020, page 34.

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## **Opening Prayer**

God of sanctuary,  
we come to you for protection.  
God of comfort,  
we gather to feel your loving embrace.  
God of assurance,  
we ask you to whisper your secrets  
to our desperate hearts.  
God of creation and beauty,  
we acknowledge your power and grace.  
We have known you in moments of joy.  
We have felt you in moments of pain.  
Moments in your presence  
are moments beyond words.  
Lead us to seek your truth and live in your light.  
We ask that you let us feel your presence  
here today,  
in gifts of revelation, gentling of hearts,  
and strengthening of spirits.  
We are listening for your message  
and looking for direction.  
Amen.

Written by Cheryl Stenson.  
**Gathering**, Pentecost 2 2020, page 36.  
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**Hymn/Special Music/Instrumental –**  
“What Does the Lord Require of You”

VU 701

## **Prayer of Confession**

Jesus, forgive us when we make excuses for staying stuck where we are because it's comfortable or it's the way we've always done it. Forgive us when we blame others for our failures and inaction. Forgive us when we fail to recognize your healing in our lives. Jesus, forgive us, and lead us in new and transformed lives. Amen.

Written by Sandra Jenkinson.  
**Gathering**, Pentecost 2 2020, page 39.  
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## Words of Assurance

God doesn't ruminant the way that we humans do.  
God lifts our burdens, forgives them, and moves  
on with us, making us light. Our gracious God sees  
you waiting. God hears your cries for mercy. Place  
your hope in God and be redeemed. Amen.

Written by Sharon Duffus.  
**Gathering**, Pentecost 2 2020, page 40.  
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## Scripture Reading

Matthew 25:14-30 The Parable of the Talents

14 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>22</sup>And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>24</sup>Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." <sup>26</sup>But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup>Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what

they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

## **Sermon/Reflection –**

### The Parable of the Talents

You may not be surprised to hear that this parable – or at least part of it – is often used for stewardship campaigns.

Used in that way – in a financial sense encouraging folks to give money, to consider giving more if a member or household is able (and sometimes pressuring to give more even if a household really isn't able) – it's a little single-focussed and really kind of one-sided.

Not to diminish or underestimate the value of financial stewardship, of giving as generously as a household is able, or the financial stewardship of a church treasurer, or a finance committee, or the trustees in investing the funds entrusted to them in the pursuit of the best rate of return. Putting aside and earning for a rainy day. That's not a bad thing at all.

Used that way and only that way, though, misses the wider and more profound implications that the parable proposes for both grace and judgement. It misses sharing the insights into the dynamics of grace and judgement in the Christian life.

If we get caught in the glare of the dollar signs – or talent signs – we risk totally missing the invitation to “enter the joy of our master”.

What's up with that, and how does it work? The master rewards the two servants and then the same master judges the third servant so harshly? Really? What kind of master does that? If we understand the master to be God – is that the kind of God we want to worship? One who rewards the rich and makes them richer and condemns the poor, making them poorer?

The stakes are high.

The story takes some working through. What do we notice as the story unfolds?

Notice the superabundance of the gifts. The table, as it were, is overflowing.

A talent is a crazy, crazy amount of money, almost unimaginable. A vast sum distributed among the three servants though in different amounts. Not only is the master in the story trusting his servants with his enormous wealth, he – or maybe she, the text doesn't say – she is trusting them with it over a long period of time.

If the talents are the first gift, then the second gift is the gift of time allowing the servants to live faithfully in this superabundance.

The servants already participate in the life of the master. If we leave it there with the two being rewarded and focus on the third – the one who hid the talent away to preserve it, to keep it safe – being judged harshly and found woefully wanting then the story becomes a story about judgement.

However, if we put the emphasis on the superabundant nature of the gifts, we are invited into a deeper understanding about the nature and reality of the kin-dom of heaven.

What's the character of the master? What's this master like?

This master invites his servants into the fullness, the superabundance of grace.

The only kind of love God can give is faithful love. And LOTS of it. A superabundance of love.

The master already has the gift of the talents, she is inviting her servants to share her joy. The master is inviting his servants to enter his joy, to share in his joy.

When the two servants are invited in – and accept the invitation to enter in – they're able to recognize the dynamics of joy that undergird the gift of faith. The joy of the master is the joy of the feast that is self-giving, sharing, being distributed into the world. The joy is discipleship in which everything is given – the gift AND the interest.

At the heart of it, the parable of the talents isn't about financial practices – it's about a gospel invitation into a realm where calculation is done away with. It's the opposite of materialistic – the interest happens in the giving away.

It's like a sacrament, like communion – being invited to a simple meal where there is good food and drink and most importantly, there is enough for everyone. We participate in the joy of our master, we enter into the joy of the master.

So, what about the third servant? His – or her – judgement does seem very harsh.

If we look at the parable as being about invitation, the third servant's plight takes on a different perspective. If the master is inviting, continually inviting into superabundance, grace, and joy – inviting into discipleship – then the only possible conclusion is that the third servant is unable to hear or accept the invitation. The third servant hasn't only hidden their talent, they've buried themselves. He puts himself outside the invitation – and we can imagine him looking in. The third servant isn't so much condemned, as he condemns himself. She puts herself in a position, in a self-created place, that doesn't know joy, that knows only darkness and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Put another way, use it or lose it! We're called to use our talents and gifts and not to be afraid. From cradle to grave, life brings with it limitation. If we focus too strongly on the limitations, we end up doing nothing.

The Serenity Prayer, "God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference" (theologian Reinhold Niebuhr) reminds us that no matter what our limitations may be, there are always things we can do and give that will make a difference. If we focus inward and live out of a sense of scarcity or fear, we'll be tempted to bury what we have to preserve it as it is, or bury it because we've deemed it too small or not enough. When we focus on God – the giver of the gift, we'll see and understand the possibilities through the context of faith. When we focus on God in that way, we enter into the fullness of God's grace, love, and joy.

May it be so. Amen.

**Meditative/Instrumental Music – *Here I Am Lord***

VU 509

### **Community Prayer**

O God, lover of the world,  
you hold all that you have created  
within your compassionate embrace.  
As you hold our lives  
torn by pain, sorrow or hatred within your aching heart,  
we cry out for wholeness—  
for ourselves, for those we love,  
and for our world.  
May your healing presence gently transform  
the places of our lives where we hold pain.  
May your loving presence be a comforting reality  
for all those who find themselves  
in despair, lost or alone.  
May your transforming presence  
create generosity in place of greed,  
harmony in place of hatred,  
and everlasting justice where evil now reigns.  
O God, lover of the world,  
from the silence of our own hearts,  
we bring before you  
these people and places that need

your healing, loving, transforming presence:

*silence*

O God, lover of the world,  
this is your world,  
and we claim your power and your presence  
to make it whole.

**Amen.**

And now, O God, we are one in prayer but bring our own thanks and concerns. If some need to say “help me”, or “save me”, or “hold me”, or “forgive me”, then let these be spoken now in the confidence of our hearts in a moment of quiet prayer.

God in Community, Holy in One,  
hear us as we pray as we have been taught,

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
forever and ever. **Amen.**

**Special Music – Anthem – *I Feel the Winds***

VU 625

### **Minute for Mission Snippet 2020**

Inspiring young people to make the world a better place is the vision of The GO Project, a ministry of Islington United Church in Toronto. Since its inception in 2007, the project has welcomed more than 1,500 staff and participants in its children- and youth-focused ministries. Not only have the lives of young people been transformed, but Spirit-filled young people have also returned to their communities and their churches to help change the lives of others.

**Nov 15: Transforming  
Young Lives and the  
World**  
The GO Project

## The Life and Work of our Congregation

- Thank you for remembering the work of the church needs your support even as the COVID-19 pandemic prevents us from all worshipping in the sanctuary or meeting in the church. We are grateful that you continue to get your offering to the office by unconventional means.
- *Deep and Wide book study* – two 90 minute sessions
- Advent Study – Interested participants – between us we'll settle on either Monday OR Thursday, daytime sessions.
- Canadian Church Calendars – the United Church version is available now from the UCRD Store online.

## Commissioning and Benediction

Life is short and we have too little time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So, be swift to love and make haste to be kind ....

Let us go as listening, pausing, responding people,  
called to live the gospel's love.

And as we go, we know that we are comforted by a  
God of many stories; we know that Jesus is moving  
alongside, a friend for the journey.

God's embodied love in human form;  
and we know that we are inspired by the Spirit's  
call to respond. Amen.

Written by Peter Chynoweth.  
**Gathering**, Pentecost 2 2020, page 44.  
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**(Sung) Amen** (sung at home, hummed in the sanctuary – unaccompanied) VU 974

A-men! A-men! Hal-le-lu-jah, amen!

**Postlude** (Instrumental) – *Go Make a Diff'rence* MV 209