

Sermon Notes, Nov 19, 2017

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30 (Bags O' Gold)

All Readings this Sunday – http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp28_RCL.html

Parables in context

Remember last week? Matthew 24 and 25 are concerned with final judgement and preparation. This cluster of parables is about how to prepare our hearts and minds to go where Jesus leads and that serving people is serving him. There is reminder of the context at the bottom of the page.

This Parable - Bags of Gold

This one is brutal -the measure you use will be used against you. To make it simple - "what you expect, is what you get." If you tend to see the world, your family, your workplace as a heartless, uncaring, and mechanical, then you have already started with a handicap and lost any wiggle room to live more freely. Darkness is a real, but there is an alternative to throwing up your hands or burying your head. The story of the bags of gold provide room for a hopeful future, where fear and brokenness don't have the final word. We have an ultimate identity of wholeness and ingenuity. The invitation of the bags of gold is to see the world with "God-full" potential and possibility.

The story of the monkey trap is one way to understand the parable of the bags of gold

India has a lot of monkeys. To trap them when they become pests, villagers will fix a bottle to the ground. The neck of the bottle is just large enough for a monkey's hand to fit through and the monkey can reach small banana in the bottle.

Before long a monkey comes by, sees the banana and thinking of a quick reward grabs it. But then, the monkey discovers that he can't get his hand out of the bottle while holding onto the banana. The monkey will scream even as a person walks up to the monkey and throws a sack over him

The monkey could let go of the banana and run before getting caught. Some do. But most of the monkeys hang on as if their life depends on it, and they are "sacked". The banana has value to the monkey and the monkey is unwilling to let go of that value even at the cost of his freedom.

- Are you willing to take your death grip off what you think is valuable in order to open your hand to God. God gives far better gifts than gold or bananas?

Here is your homework for your thanksgiving week. The next time your run into a group or a person who is gossipy, dark, and/or cynical. I want you to be *cheerful and stupid* in response! This was a favorite adage of the late Dr. Joy Brown - a pop radio psychologist who died in 2016. There is a homage to her on a recent podcast of *This American Life* that you might enjoy <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/622/who-you-gonna-call?act=3>

Joy Brown writes about stupid and cheerful —*I am a great fan of "stupid and cheerful." If someone says something negative, instead of responding, "Oh my God, I can't believe you said that," turn it around. Try saying, "It's so helpful to have somebody give me feedback." If you just take the superficial approach to things that may be hurtful or insulting, it makes the other person do the heavy lifting. If they really want to criticize, they are going to have to do more work. If someone is trying to insult you, let them do the work. And if that wasn't their intention, your negative reply just might have cost you an ally. Keep your response neutral, simple, and "stupid"! What if you expected your relatives to act in a generous and expansive way this thanksgiving? maybe you will get something better in return than the same old, tired drama of Thanksgiving. If not, at least you are a little different.*

Summary of Matthew 24-25 (from last week)

Chapter 24: 1-29 It's all going to fall apart, everything is awful. **30-31** The cavalry, God, shows up. **32-34** The fig tree – it got too impatient. Its leaves came out too early. **36-44** The workers in the field – they did not pay attention, and some missed the bandwagon. So be ready unlike them. **45-50** The servants left in charge. They got too cocky and started throwing their weight around and got drunk and lazy. Don't be like them. **Chapter 25 - Last week (Nov 12) 1-13** The foolish bridesmaids weren't prepared, but they all fell asleep! Stay prepared | **This week (Nov 19) 14-30** The bags of gold, the parable of the talents. Some did well others used fear to hide. Don't do that! | **Next week (Nov 26): 31-46** Sheep and goats – don't treat those in your life with good and bad categories unless you want to be sorted the same way.

Wake up you lazy slackers, invest well, treat others like Jesus, and if they insult you - try on cheerful and stupid. Todd