

Knox Presbyterian Church Service

August 10 2025

Interim Minister: The Rev. Daniel Martinez

Minister: The Rev. Wes Denyer

Music: R. Cloud Iris

Elder: Lorraine Whiting

Reader: Mary Dimech

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement - Unison (Worship Elder)

As followers of Jesus, we are compelled to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. It is our love of God and neighbour that leads us to acknowledge that we gather with gratitude on the traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people. We pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves again to just and respectful relationships.

Come, now is the time for worship

Call to Worship - Responsive

Give thanks to God and tell of God's gifts.

We will sing praises for all that God has done.

We will seek God's presence continually.

We will always remember the blessings of God and glorify God forever!

77 - From all that dwells below the skies

Gathering Prayer

Creator God, through Jesus Christ, you have called us to be your people and given us a purpose for our lives each day. You created the world and all that is in it and you work reconciliation and renewal among us. We gather to worship and adore you, and to be renewed to live out your purpose in the week ahead. Faithful God, We confess that our choices do not always reflect your purposes for our lives. Faithfulness to you is sometimes the last thing on our minds. We often choose the easiest way or what suits our interests, not yours. Forgive us, O God, when we fail to remember what you require of us. Renew a right spirit within us by your grace. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

While it is true that we have all sinned, it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ. To all who humbly seek the mercy of God, I say, in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven. Be at peace with God, with one another, and with yourself.

The Lord's Prayer - Unison

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the

kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

689 - *Simply trusting everyday*

□ Prayer for Understanding - Unison (Worship Reader)

God of Wisdom, speak to us again through the teaching of Scripture. Challenge us and comfort us with the presence of your Holy Spirit, so that we are assured of your love and inspired to follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen.

Scripture

Matthew 25:14-30 (28 NT)

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once ¹⁶ the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ 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.’ ²¹ 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.’ ²² 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.’ ²³ 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.’ ²⁴ 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, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Response:

Let us hear what the spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Sermon: The Frightened Servant

The Gospel passage we read today is called the Parable of the Talents ... I received a little picture book about this parable when I was in Sunday School. I can still remember most of the pictures.

A rich man goes away and entrusts his money to three of his servants. In my little book, the servant who gets the five talents of gold goes out and buys a fish market, the business thrives, and he doubles his investment. The servant with two talents goes out and buys a little textile store, but he also does very well. People come and go from his little shop all day long, and he manages to double his investment.

And then it shows the last servant - the servant who only receives a single talent of gold. He's portrayed as this little, meek, paranoid fellow. He goes out late at night and finds an old deserted building. He goes into the basement of the building, digs this deep hole in the ground, and he takes the carefully wrapped talent of gold, and buries it.

Of course, when the master comes home, the three servants are called before him. They must each give an accounting of the money they were entrusted with. The first two servants are praised for their ambition and good fortune, while the third servant, who buried his talent of gold, is abused and berated by the master. In my book, this timid little guy is fired or demoted or something like that, and he skulks out of the room - head down, little tears running down his cheeks ... and you know, he's the failure, the one who blew it, the fall guy for the whole story.

So what are we supposed to take from this parable? How does it strike you? What's your reaction to the story? What do you learn from the parable?

Well, there's one thing I want to clarify, right from the beginning of this sermon. This story is first and foremost about money. A lot of preachers have used this story without reference to the fact, we're talking about talents of gold – it's a weight of gold – a first century measurement of money - about a thousand dollars at the time of Jesus. It's really just a coincidence we have the same word, "talent", to refer to something like playing the piano, or singing soprano or being able to do woodworking.

Now, it's okay to move on to the discussion of other things, once you've dealt with a talent for what it is; but sometimes I've heard this sermon preached as if Jesus was referring to the kind of talents we know. And so the temptation is to use this parable, to kind of beat people over the head with it, when the church is looking for new choir members, or someone to run the Youth Group, or new people on the Session or on a committee.

But I believe this parable is being misused when the word "talent" is taken to mean something other than what Jesus was really talking about.

The other common misuse of this parable, is to use it when the church needs more money - when we want to increase the offering. I mean, *it is a wonderful story for this* ... it's just a misuse of the parable.

I heard this one minister, he was coming down on that third servant, the timid one, like a ton of bricks: "What a sin to bury his money in the ground!" "It's the same as taking the money we don't really need and putting it in the bank, instead of **giving it to the Lord!**" "You know, that money in your wallet isn't growing ... that money in the bank takes a long time to double, and by then, inflation has eaten up all your profits. But here it says in Scripture, "Use your money for the Lord, and it will double in value!" If you give a hundred dollars to God, you'll get two hundred dollars back."

Well ... it sounds like a good investment scheme: double your money; but I'm just not so sure that's what Jesus was talking about in this parable.

But, I suppose the most common interpretation of the parable is this: "***If you don't use it, you lose it.***" Because what happens in this parable is the third servant ends up having to give back his talent of gold, and he has to give it to the richest servant, the one who now has ten talents of gold - "*The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.*" "*God helps them who help themselves!*"

Well, I hate to be the odd man out, but I don't hear that ... I don't hear, "If you don't use it, you may lose it." You know what I hear? I hear this: "***If you use it, you may lose it*** ... If you use it, you may lose it." That's what *frightened* the third servant.

There's a risk involved. The first servant was risking the five talents of gold in order to make ten talents. You know as well as I do, you can't turn five thousand dollars into ten thousand dollars, without risking the loss of the five thousand. Ask anybody who's invested in the Stock Market, or heard a hot tip ... "*If you use it, you may lose it.* I can testify to that!

You see, that third servant would look a whole lot smarter, if we changed the parable just *a little bit*. The three servants are called before the master, and the first servant says, "You gave me five talents, and I bought a fish market, and it was a bad year for fish. I only have two talents now." And the second servant says, "You gave me two talents, and I bought a textile shop, but I had an infestation of moths and they ruined my stock and I was forced to declare bankruptcy. I don't have anything left."

Now all of a sudden, the third servant begins to look like a pretty sharp cookie, "***I buried it in the ground!*** Here, my Lord, is *all your money back* ... not one penny has been lost."

Now who's the hero? "*If you use it, you may lose it.*"

The third servant is beginning to look a little wiser, a little smarter: "Hang on to what you've got and don't lose it"; "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"; "it's better to be safe than sorry".

Now, that's not the parable Jesus preached, but I want you to see, we'd better be careful when we stomp all over the third servant, because we might just be stomping on ourselves.

Now ... stay with me here ...

It's a complicated parable, and, in my opinion, it's been interpreted wrongly most of the time. We really need to dig into this ... so stay with me ...

This is what I think ... most of the teaching I've received from church, from home, from society, from school, is the wisdom of the third servant - "***Don't take big risks***". It's the fear of losing what we have, of being hurt or embarrassed, or "letting the bird in the hand get away."

I know how the third servant feels. *He was afraid*. Listen to his words, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours ... *I was afraid* ..."

Now, maybe that's what this parable is about ... "*I was afraid*" ... the enemy is fear.

"Why did you lie?" I was afraid to tell the truth.

"Why did you never get married?" I was afraid I would be rejected by the one I love.

"Why didn't you speak out?" I was afraid I'd get it wrong.

I think many of us live with these fears: fear of giving, fear of insecurity, fear of failure, fear of speaking out ... we hold back. We bury our potential in the ground. I think that's what Jesus was talking about.

I wonder to whom Jesus spoke this parable? Obviously he was talking to a group of fearful listeners. Afraid to release themselves, and what they had to others.

Maybe some people like the Pharisees whose job it was to write the laws of Judaism - to share it, to teach it, to protect it, to defend it ... and they were surrounded by people who didn't believe.

What do you think they saw to be their job? ... **"to hold on to what we have in a dark and skeptical world!"**

I can understand it. I can certainly appreciate it ... but what is Jesus saying to them, "Turn loose ... you've been entrusted with something ... risk! Share it! Associate with people who are different from yourselves - with foreigners, with the poor, the blind, the lame ... with everybody!"

"Well, they may not believe it. They may not listen. They may not ... well ..." Whatever the excuse ... **it is not good enough. The enemy is fear!**

Let me tell you a story ...

In 2016, the congregation I served in Toronto, partnered with two other Presbyterian Churches to sponsor a Syrian refugee family. My congregation, Rosedale Presbyterian Church took the lead on this initiative.

On August 23rd of that year, we received an email from the government saying, "**Your** refugee family is delayed, but don't worry, in the next few months we'll offer you a *replacement family* - you can **swap out** your family for another family – a family that will arrive sooner!"

Now, yes, of course representatives of Citizenship and Immigration assured us that, when ... **and if** ... our original family was ready to travel, the government would be happy to sponsor them ... but I had to ask myself ... *is that good enough?*

Do we just stay silent and submissive? Say, "Thank you very much, we'll stay quiet, relinquishing this family that's been counting on us for the last eight months, and trust that "*father knows best*" – government bureaucrats will **fight** for this young family and take good care of them – **make sure they get here to Canada?**"

In consultation with our group of Presbyterians, we decided to ask a question. We said, “Can we sponsor both families – a replacement family now, and our original family when they’re ready to travel?”

Nope! Nope! For some unknown reason ... *we were not allowed!*

And then, to my surprise, just a few days later, I received a phone call from CBC, radio “We understand your refugee sponsorship group may be offered a replacement family? What are you going to do?”

I now found myself in a challenging predicament. *What should I do?* “Do I stay silent – bury my talent in the ground – follow the safe and quiet and easy path – keep your “head down?”

I was scared of what might happen if I spoke out? Will I be helping in our effort to rescue our family from hardship and danger, or would I only make things worse?

But you see, here’s what I couldn’t get out of in my head. It was an image. It was an image of this family opening up a letter – this Muslim family who believed there was a church group – **a church group!** - in Canada who cared enough about them to go to extraordinary lengths to help them start a new life in Canada, away from the violence in Syria – this family who was told in February, “Pack your bags, you’ll be leaving any day now!” – I had this image in my head of them opening up a letter from the Canadian government, and it says something like this, “Your refugee claim is still in process, but the Presbyterian Church that promised to get you to Canada, will no longer be sponsoring you. They’ve abandoned you for another family!”

My church ... **our church** – that made a commitment to bring this family to Canada ... “**we’ve given up on you**” ... because *it’s taking too long ... and you know us Canadians – if it takes too long, or it’s too hard, we lose interest real quick!*

I thought about it, and I prayed about it, and still I couldn’t get that picture out of my head ... I said yes to the CBC reporter, and I said yes to Matt Galloway on Metro Morning, and I said yes to the camera crew from City TV and the CBC, and I said yes to the Globe and Mail and CTV and Al Jazeera and the BBC.

I didn’t know what was going to happen. I didn’t know if I’d done the right thing. I hoped and prayed this media pressure would help **our family** and that ultimately we would one day be able to welcome them to Canada.

So here’s what happened ... I was able to meet with then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and receive his assurance that our first family – our original family – would eventually be permitted to come to Canada. We sponsored our replacement family, and later the next year, our original family arrived in Canada as well.

In the parable of the talents ... that third servant ... he was frightened. I understand that ... life is frightening ... life is challenging ... we might make a mistake, we might mess things up ... we might say the wrong thing.

But after we’ve thought and prayed, may God grant us the courage to set aside our fears, and speak out for those who have no voice – to speak out for the Christ in others who say, “As you

have done it for one of the least of these – my brothers and sisters ... you have done it unto me ... you have done it unto a Syrian refugee family ... *you have done it unto me ...*”

462 - All my hope on God is founded

Invitation to Offering

The sacrifice that honours God is a thankful heart. So let us present our offering today with thankful hearts, grateful for all God’s goodness to us.

306 - Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Prayer of Dedication - Unison

Abundant God, through your goodness we have these gifts to share. Bless what we offer for your purposes. Give us courage to offer ourselves more fully to you, so that our lives bring you honour and glory through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pastoral Prayers

Living God, We give thanks for the gift of faith that gives us courage when things are difficult, and for the encouragement we find in the faith of others we meet. Inspire us to remain loyal to you as our true Source of life and hope.

Faithful God, thank you for guiding us when we cannot see the path ahead. Thank you for showing us a way through our challenges when we cannot see a solution on our own. Renew our trust in you in these days when so much is confusing and uncertain.

We pray for those who wonder if they can rely on you, and for those who are afraid for the future. Give them courage to listen for your call and follow your leading.

We pray for those who doubt. Give them courage to explore those doubts and questions and so discover renewed trust in your promises.

We pray for those who are impatient. Bless them in times of waiting for what comes next and fill them with kindness.

We pray for those who have chosen a path that has led to trouble. Turn their hearts towards you and lead them in ways of goodness, justice, and generosity.

We pray for your Church in these days when so much is changing. Give us wisdom to discern ways to reach out to our community, and faithfulness to keep following Jesus into the future you hold in your hands.

Faithful God, we depend on you. Be gracious and bless us, so that our lives may be a blessing to others. Amen.

324 - Great is thy faithfulness

Blessing

Jesus said. "Do not be afraid. I am with you always. Trusting in that promise, let us go out, without fear, to love God and to serve the world that God loves. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, this day and always. Amen.

622 - Go now in peace