

**The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**November 15, 2020**  
**Matthew 25:14-30**

*“Waiting for Jesus: Living Responsibly”*

Is there anyone who hasn't played the board game of Monopoly? It's been around since 1935, and depending on which version of the game you have, the total amount of money in a Monopoly game will be either \$15,140 or \$20,580 (*Sundays and Seasons: Year A, 2020*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2019; p. 307). That may seem like a lot of money, but most of us would quickly say that a person could not live on either of those two amounts, especially in this area outside our nation's capital. In today's Gospel lesson, we hear a lot about money, but it's in a unit that we don't use anymore. A talent was a monetary unit worth at least fifteen years' wages for a laborer. Some scholars have set this at a higher amount, saying a talent was twenty years' wages. Either way, that's a huge amount of money. If we go with the conservative figure and use fifteen years' wages as the value of one talent, it would take the money from 75 Monopoly games to equal the five talents given to the first servant in Jesus' parable. Two talents would equal 30 games' worth of Monopoly money, and the one talent would equal 15 games. At the end of the day, Monopoly is just a game using play money. But the parable which Jesus tells us in today's Gospel lesson is not a game. Like those servants in the parable, we have been entrusted with the riches of the kingdom of God that have been apportioned to each one of us. How will we use these? This becomes the theme for preaching today under the theme, "Waiting for Jesus: Living Responsibly." May the Lord's rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus' sake.

The church year is winding down this month and closes with the Festival of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the church year, on Sunday, November 22. In these closing Sundays of the church year, there is a clear emphasis on the end of all things and Christ's promised coming again. We're in the midst of a 3-week preaching series that speaks to this. The Gospel lessons all come from Matthew 25, each one picking up where the previous one left off. Last week, we focused on Matthew 25:1-13 and Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins under the theme, "Waiting for Jesus: Living Expectantly." Today, we focus on Matthew 25:14-30 and Jesus' parable of the three servants entrusted with their master's talents under the theme, "Waiting for Jesus: Living Responsibly." Next week on Sunday, November 22 (the Festival of Christ the King), we focus on Matthew 25:31-46 and Jesus' words about the final judgement under the theme: "Waiting for Jesus: Living Compassionately." Our waiting for the Savior's promised coming is to be expectant, responsible, and compassionate.

Today's Scripture lessons remind us of the coming day of the Lord. The Old Testament lesson (Zephaniah 1:7-16) is especially graphic and served as a wake-up call to God's people of old. The prophet warned them that sin without repentance will lead to destruction. Do we hear that today? The Psalmody (Psalm 90:1-12) reminds us that life is fleeting, but God is eternal. The final verse is one we would do well to commit to memory: **“So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom”** (Psalm 90:12). In the Epistle lesson (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11), Paul reminds believers that the day of the Lord will come “like a thief in the night” – suddenly, unexpectedly. Paul encourages believers in every generation to live sober and upright lives in the midst of a world that is passing away. Paul's closing words are full of hope: **“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing”** (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11).

So how do we live responsibly in this time of waiting for Jesus' return? This is really about stewardship, not just of money, but of our entire lives – our gifts, talents, and abilities; our selves, our time, and our

possessions. In Jesus' parable, after the master entrusted his three servants with different amounts of talents, each servant has to decide what he will do. The first two invest theirs and make a good return. The third servant buries his in the ground for sake-keeping. In the world of Jesus' day, this was believed to be the best security against theft, plus whoever buried the money was freed from liability. In other words, this servant played it safe – very safe. This isn't necessarily bad; however, behind this is fear. When confronted by his master about not making any return on his investment, the servant said: **"I was afraid"** (Matthew 25:25). And this is probably where the parables starts to break down for us. The master seems to respond in a cruel manner to the servant who was prudent, cautious, and careful. He was being judicious and conservative. Wasn't he living responsibly with what had been entrusted to him? The money did not increase, but neither did it decrease. The master got back no more than what he had originally. How are we to understand this?

In Jesus' parable, caution fails and daring is rewarded. In our own lives, being prudent and judicious may certainly be justified, but not when it comes to faith. "We stand to lose much if we treat the Gospel as something to be preserved rather than put to work. There is risk involved in exposing our faith and values to the glare of public examination, of course. But unless we are willing to put it all on the line, taking chances for the sake of increasing the Gospel harvest, we will end up losing even what we had to start with" (Ibid). Living responsibly as we wait for Jesus means taking risks for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. It means moving outside our comfort zone. The kingdom of heaven does not necessarily square up with how things are reckoned here on earth. This is a story about God and the responsibility that he gives to his people. **The Lord expects his people to be enterprising and resourceful with what he has entrusted to our care, whether that is little or much. He expects us to manage wisely what belongs to him, even though he seems to be away, like the master in the parable. Simply waiting in fearful anticipation of our Master's coming again is not what we're called to do. If fear is our motivation, then nothing will ever get done. The truth is that we don't always use our gifts as God would want. It's natural to be cautious with our treasure and our talents – and that's exactly the point. It's not our treasure; they're not our talents. They belong to the Lord. All of these things are just on loan to us for a time.** In the parable, the third servant avoided risk out of fear. That might be our motivation also. What if we use up what we've been given? What if we invest poorly? Yes, these are always possibilities. However, the greater sin is to do nothing.

Jesus also could have played it safe, avoiding the pain of entering our broken world of sin and sorrow. Jesus could have chosen not to take the risk of going to the cross. Jesus could have chosen this, but he did not. He took the risk of love by offering his own life upon the cross for the full forgiveness of all our sins. Through the cleansing blood of Jesus, we have been set free from sin; set free from fear of God's wrath and punishment; set free from the fear of futility and hopelessness. We have been set free from all of these things through Jesus' sacrifice in our behalf, and because of this, we have been set free for service. The thrust of Jesus' parable is not about repaying a debt of money or sin, but in thankfulness for all that God in Christ has done for us, living responsibly in light of our Master's return. Here is a call to faithful use of what the Master has so graciously given to us. Here is a call for each one of us to follow our Master's example and take that risk of love. Here is a call to live responsibly as we wait for Jesus. Amen.