

## “Wise investing”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill  
Sunday November 15, 2020

Matthew 25:14-30

How many of you have begun to think about Christmas?

Some of you are starting to make plans.

In the really nice stretch of weather I know many of you got your Christmas lights up.

In the midst of COVID-19 many of us are wondering what we should and shouldn't do for Christmas gatherings.

We are all recognizing that, our Christmas celebrations will be different this year.

So, let me ask you, other years, when things were normal – prior to the pandemic.

How much time and energy did you spend preparing for Jesus' return, or even in making room for the celebration of his birth in your lives?

It is work to keep Jesus in our Christmas plans.

The world has given us a lot of “to dos” for Christmas and almost none of them have to do with preparing our lives, our hearts, our homes, our families for Jesus' birth, or his return in glory.

So let me encourage you in the midst of your thinking of the things you can't do, you might recognize that this year is the perfect year to make some changes- thinking about what you can do to prepare yourself, your home, your families, your celebrations, for Jesus' coming.

Long, long ago, long before I was a minister, before I was married, I decided that worship was important to me, and to Christmas and to my keeping Christ in Christmas, and keeping a sense of what Christmas was about.

My family plans, my food and preparation plans, and all my celebrations are built around the essentials of worship and what this season is really about.

I would encourage you to ask God about your time, about these days, about the holy days – the holidays, what's most important.

Schedule some time with God and ask God to speak to you and give you wisdom and courage to make your plans as God directs.

This morning, our Bible reading tells us about a day when the Master is going to return, and we are going to be held to account for what we did with all that has been entrusted to us.

One of the characteristics of our time, our generation, as opposed to earlier times and generations, is that we focus our vision very much on the rights of the individual.

We cry for our rights and our freedoms.

We believe “it is my life and have the right to do with it as I please, no one has the right to tell me what to do with my life.”

But, according to Jesus' parable, nothing is really our own to do with as we please.

“the master summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them”

And after a long time, all those servants were summoned by the Master and asked to give account with what they did with what was entrusted to them.

And notice that each servant was entrusted with a great treasure.  
A talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages of a laborer.  
So each slave was given a great gift – greater than any could have hoped to have earned.

And the Master, Jesus, asked each of them to do business with the gift they had been given.

We have, all of us, been given several gifts.

We have been given life, a certain number of years, we have skills, and abilities, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit at work in us, and we have been given the gift of salvation.

Salvation, God at work in our lives, is the gift that none of us has earned, it is the gift of greatest value, given to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

So each of the servants, is sent off with this the gift, grace and life and time to invest it.  
And you'll notice in the parable that one slave is not called smarter or wiser than another.  
It seems that grace invested, multiplies.  
Just as a healthy tree bears fruit by it's nature, so grace lived, invested in life, given to others in service, in forgiveness, in learning to live in the freedom of Christ multiplies the gift.

The gifts used are doubled.  
And the master in Jesus' parable doesn't seem at all interested in how much each servant made.  
He's not much of a book-keeper or accountant.  
The first two servants get the exact same response from Jesus; "well done good and trustworthy servants"  
I gave you a share of my property, a gift to invest and you used it well.

The Master is extremely interested in servants who use what they've been given.  
The Master is angered at the third servant because he did nothing with what he had.  
This enormous gift of grace, forgiveness, redemption given by the blood of Christ was entrusted to the third servant, and he found it a burden rather than a joy.  
He buried it, and handed it back to the master untouched, relieved to be free from the responsibility of having to do anything with it.

Robert Farrar Capon describes the Masters response after he has told the third servant that his one talent will be given to the one who made ten, he says;  
"And you know why I'm going to do that? First of all, to remind everybody that when I give you a gift (grace, forgiveness), I expect you to do business with it, to keep it moving (to forgive others as you are forgiven), not just to keep it to yourself in some napkin (some low-risk spiritual life in which you neither sin much nor love much). But second, I'm going to give him your gift to show everybody that I never really cared about results anyway. " ("Parables of the Kingdom, Grace and Judgment" p.422)

The third servant could have put the gift in a low interest savings account, and the master would have accepted that, though maybe he might have been a little disappointed.

But I'm sure the third servant could have come back with less than he started with, gambled his life in faith, and even if he lost, he would have heard the words "well done good and trustworthy servant".

Only when you bank your life on grace, when you live a life of faith, in truth you cannot lose. It will pay off. Doing business with God's gifts – giving them, trading with them, investing them in life, they will multiply.

I want to read you a few lines from a poem by Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, known as "Woodbine Willie" to soldiers in WWI.

He writes:

I gamble like a man. I bet my life  
Upon one side in life's great war. I must,  
I can't stand out. I must take sides.  
The man who is a neutral in this fight is not  
A man. He's bulk and body without breath,  
Cold leg of lamb without mint sauce. A fool  
He makes me sick. Good Lord! Weak tea! Cold slops!  
I want to live, live out, not wobble through  
My life somehow, and then into the dark.  
I must have God.  
I have to choose, I back the scent of life  
Against its stink. That's what the Faith works out at Finally.  
I can't stand shiv'ring on the bank, I plunge  
head first. I bet my life on Beauty, Truth,  
And Love, not abstract but incarnate Truth,  
Not Beauty's passing shadow but its Self,  
It's very self made flesh, Love realized.  
I bet my life on Christ, Christ crucified.

(from the "Unutterable Beauty")

We have been given much, you and I.

And one day we will be called to give account for what we have done with God's gifts given to us, especially the grace and freedom and forgiveness we have in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The wrong answer is to respond with fear of the Master.

We are invited into a wild adventure of faith and to bet our lives on God's love and goodness, and to invest his gifts in this world, this life we have been given.

But in the end it is a choice. Thanks be to God.

God of grace and glory, you give us a choice, to choose you and your ways, or not. You give us free will and you have given us the gift of grace- the gift of salvation through the cross of Jesus your Son. You have invited us into relationship with you, and to use the gifts you've entrusted to us. But always the choice is ours. Lord, you have also told us that one day we will stand before you, and we will be called to account for all we have given from your hand, and what we've done with it. Help us to live the wild adventure of faith to bet our lives on your great love for us in Jesus Christ. Amen.