



ST. JOHN &  
BETHESDA  
LUTHERAN  
CHURCHES

**Sunday, November 15, 2020**



**Advent - Christmas  
In the Home  
Devotional**

**Complete with  
Candles  
Placemat Wreath  
Devotional Guide  
Scandinavian Recipes  
Ideas to Connect with Others  
Daily Joy Producing Activities**

If you would like a set of these seasonal resources, please email  
[PastorBorgstadt@gmail.com](mailto:PastorBorgstadt@gmail.com)  
or leave a message at the church office  
712-643-5495.

They will be available Sunday, November 22

## Matthew 25:14-30

*Jesus tells a parable about his second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await his return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.*

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>14</sup>“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.' "

*The old lady handed her bank card to a bank teller and said, "I would like to withdraw \$10."*

*The teller told her, "For withdrawals less than \$100, please use the ATM."*

*The old lady wanted to know why. The teller returned her bank card and irritably told her, "These are the rules. Please leave if there is no other matter. There is a line of customers behind you."*

*The old lady remained silent for a few seconds, then handed the card back to the teller and said, "Please help me withdraw all the money I have."*

*The teller was astonished when she checked the account balance. She nodded her head, leaned over, and respectfully told her, "You have \$300,000 in your account and the bank doesn't have that much cash*

*currently. Could you make an appointment and come again tomorrow?"*

*The old lady then asked how much she could withdraw immediately. The teller told her any amount up to \$3000.*

*"Well, please let me have \$3000 now." The teller then handed it very friendly and respectfully to her. The old lady put \$10 in her purse and asked the teller to deposit \$2990 back into her account.*

*The moral of this tale: Don't be difficult with old people, they've spent a lifetime learning the skills.*

Please remember that I started this sermon with a nod at the wisdom of those whose life experience is extensive. And also, please be aware that I'm not trying to be difficult, but that I'm aware you may not like this sermon. I have not liked the direction it has gone either, but feel it is only faithful to deliver it. There has been much prayer and a little wringing of my hands in preparing it.

We have another *"kingdom of heaven is like..."* parable from Jesus today. We're coming to the end of the year of Matthew and next week is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday before we start Advent and our study of Mark's gospel. Perhaps Jesus has saved the most challenging and demanding illustration of the kingdom for last.

Three slaves are given huge sums of money from their master, with the expectation that they will be responsible for how they use them. They do not know when that accounting will be. To show you how extreme this parable is, a talent, the form of money in the parable, is worth about 30 pounds of

gold. As of yesterday, the spot price of gold was \$1,877 per ounce. One talent would be worth approximately \$ 900,960. They figure a talent was worth about 20 years wages for the average worker. And the master entrusted 5, 3, and 1 talents to his slaves.

Just so you know, over the years the term talent which was a designation of money became associated with abilities. But this parable is using the financial understanding only.

So, the first slave takes the 5 talents, a 100 years' wages, and uses them to make another 5 talents. The second slave doubles the 3 talents he has. It is the last slave that, for fear of the master's retribution, buries the sole talent he has been given so he can return it to the master and avoid punishment.

Many times, we see the encouragement to take a risk. We almost sense—or maybe it is wish—that the master would be just as happy with the servants if they took a risk and even if they lost it. We see that merely hiding it away is not acceptable.

The questions for this parable for me at this time are not easy ones. The *whos* and *whats* and *whens* and *wheres* and *whys* make me think about what God is expecting of me and of other followers of Jesus.

If I start with God as the owner and myself and other Christians as the slaves, I have a clear road to follow in order to find out the answer to the other questions. The *what* is the kingdom. Jesus tells his followers in Luke

12:32 ""Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." You probably remember the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price from other parables.

The *when* can shape the answers to the following questions. Our tending of the kingdom and the message of Jesus is tied to the *when*. There is always a big story from scripture that can inform the circumstances of life. And there is a story for the time we live in right now. We want to be sure it is the right story that brings life.

There is a branch of the Christian faith that has gained a louder voice over the past several decades and for many in our world, those in that tradition speak for the entire Christian fellowship. In case you're wondering, we're not that branch, that tradition. They tend to emphasize following the commandments to gain God's blessing. We say that we are sinful by nature and cannot please God. They say a person has to "accept Jesus as Lord and Savior" and we say that when we were dead in sin, God made us alive in Christ. They focus on what humans do, we focus on what God has done and is doing. They have found voices in political leadership that cater to their priorities. We pray for voices in political leadership that work for peace and justice in all the earth.

Right now, in the midst of pandemic, the trend of moving away from organized Christianity has accelerated. While there are many who say they are "spiritual but not religious" the side of Christianity they see most in the media has a narrow spirituality that excludes many people—sometimes

even those in their own families. More and more of our neighbors are coming to the conclusion that they do not want any part of that Christianity. They say that they like Jesus, but his followers not so much.

We have had a period where we exported our flavor of Christianity around the world. We sent missionaries. Now we need missionaries to come and bring an expression of our faith that is authentic and credible to our neighbors. Unless we speak up (in both words and actions) and witness to a kingdom that is worth living for and dying for, the faith as we have known it will be further impacted by COVID-19.

Over the past several weeks, we've talked about the kingdom as a place where small becomes large, where scarcity is nothing compared to sufficiency, where everyone is welcome and where we need each other, where love is the foundational motivation for every action. This kind of kingdom is good news in a world where talking to a friend or neighbor can lead to a life-threatening illness. This kind of kingdom is good news in a world where we are constantly told to self-quarantine if we suspect we've encounter someone who is ill. This kind of kingdom is good news in a world where competing voices leave the individual wondering if truth matters at all.

In our challenging reality today, we have been entrusted with the kingdom. It is our call to ensure the realities of God's love and grace are woven into the fabric of our changed and changing community. You and I can make sure the new normal that emerges when the pandemic is over includes the

guiding stories of Jesus and his ministry, of the lessons of the Old Testament characters like David and Sampson and Deborah and Sarah. We can earn the chance to tell the story in ways our world has never heard it—with a focus on love and care and compassion. And it all depends on our actions now.

This week the governor urged an increased focus on doing the things that keep our communities healthy: washing hands, observing safe physical distancing and mask wearing when appropriate. She set some limits on the number of people gathering in both indoor and outdoor settings. The medical community has also spoken about the rapid increase in positive cases over the past few weeks. Their concern has been that if we do not get this pandemic spread under control, we will overwhelm our medical systems. Even now, rural hospitals are full and those in larger communities are increasing COVID admissions dramatically.

We have been entrusted with an amazing treasure—the Kingdom of Heaven. It is far more than we could ever earn or deserve. And God expects us to use this resource to bless others.

We are to be light. The next few weeks will be very dark if our communities continue to see exponential spread the corona virus.

We are to be a city on a hill. What we do and say are to be visible to those who are looking for a safe place, a home in the wilderness.

We are to be salt. In the midst of fear, we live faith. In the face of uncertainty, we live with intention. In a time of anxiety, we live calmed by the love God gives us for each other and our neighbor. These have the preservative properties of salt.

The pandemic ramped up as we approached Easter. The Church proclaimed Christ risen.

The pandemic separated us until the middle of June. The Church worked together to see that Christ was proclaimed, our neighbors' needs were met, and our communities were filled with compassion.

The pandemic has come at us again. What will the Church do to keep Christ's mission strong, his message drawing people closer to God?

We may have to make tough decisions again about how we worship for a time. These decisions may be difficult, especially as we approach the wonder and inspiration of Christmas. We have taken some steps to find ways to meet our deep desires for worship in the sanctuary and the feeling of community together.

Next week we will have a special Advent-Christmas Christmas experience for in the home. Complete with candles and prayers and even Scandinavian comfort food recipes, this will keep us connected to the things that we have treasured in the past, even if we have to do them at home. Martin Luther encouraged faith formation to be centered in the home. That's why he wrote

the Small Catechism. Our resource is not as timeless as the Catechism, but will help us in this time.

Remember the Jewish Passover meal. This is the meal Jesus repurposed into our Holy Communion celebration. It chronicles the Hebrews' exodus from slavery and marks a new way God's people were community. That meal is still celebrated in Jewish homes every year. And at the end of the meal, they say, "Next year in Jerusalem." They acknowledge they are not in their spiritual home, and that they long to be there, together. They hope to experience it in the near future.

And do you remember the lady at the bank, who found a way to make the withdrawal she needed? Please be assured that your council leaders and pastor are working together to be sure this Christmas feeds our spirits and blesses our souls. It's okay if it's not like any other—because (thank God) 2020 has not been like any other. The pandemic may threaten this Advent and Christmas season, but the Church will live out the story for the sake of the community. We will use the treasure God has entrusted to us to bring light and life and hope to Dunlap and Moorhead and beyond.