

**Rev. George Arceneaux**

**11/19/2023**

**Pentecost 25**

This morning, friends, we're back in hell. And by that I mean, NOT my preaching time which I suspect Rich Nied, Peter Thompson, or any number of other wonderful yucksters might be able to fire back at me with, but I mean in the Gospel, we're already back to weeping and gnashing of teeth in the outer darkness. It was just this past October 15<sup>th</sup>, the day of our celebration of new ministry, that we heard Jesus talk about a wedding party and throwing an ill-dressed fellow out into the darkness to weep and gnash his teeth, and this morning, we're back facing down such similar weeping and gnashing of teeth with a man's whose sin was poor fiscal responsibility.

I hope today's message can be something of a companion piece, not just to that sermon from a few weeks ago, but to what we talked about last week when we talked about the importance of baptism. When we talked about those sacred promises that we make to seek and serve Christ in all persons and that we use our God given gifts to do so.

Today's story is one that reminds us that we can do wonderful things even if we don't think we have much. And, most gravely, there is a consequence if we don't give of what we have. As much as I do not ascribe to that imagery of fire and brimstone and eternal torment taught to me in my youth which has taken much of my life thus far to disabuse myself of, I EARNESTLY believe that there is a dire consequence to not following the Good News that each and every one of us has power, is seen, and is loved.

The story is about as ridiculous on its face as any number of other parables where a partier at a wedding banquet is thrown to the outer darkness for disobeying the dress code, but today the sin is that our investor chooses to protect and hide the investment made in him by the rich man. His one talent, the cash he is

given, he buries it rather than invest and use it, for fear that he might lose what he has been given. For fear that he would return to his master with nothing rather than just a little. And for this he is condemned by his master to the outer darkness.

Honestly, I get a sense of fiscal responsibility from this guy, I mean, I get the notion of trying to save what you have, look at the stock market that sucker is up and down hour by hour. But the sin of the man with the one talent isn't that he didn't return with more money. I really believe that had he returned with nothing that would have been inconsequential to the rich man. The master of the story is wealthy enough that he calls these talents (which by the way would be estimated these days in the realm of tens of thousands of dollars) he calls these talents "a few things." The sin of man with one talent isn't that he returned with more money. If he had returned with nothing, I can imagine a version of this story in which the response to this man was the same as that to the others, "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." The sin isn't that he returned with no more. It is instead that he did nothing with what he was given. He betrayed the trust of his master to try.

I suspect some of you may have pre-empted the point of this sermon and if so please, steep in it with me. This is a story that tells us to use what we have, no matter how much or how little we may think it is. This story shows us that if we do so, we will find ourselves in charge of more and in joy. If we are kind now in the ways that we can, this will open our awareness to more good we can see and do in the world.

But I want to linger on the fact that there is a consequence when we don't give of what we have. If we live into that fear of being who we want to be, if we're afraid of risking ourselves, we can find ourselves impoverished of the gifts we have. We forget how to love. And we develop habits of bitterness, scapegoating, and stagnation.

And we as Christians are called to help one another feel encouraged to share of what we have.

My belief is that God is all about love AND I will say this here. I believe that our God can be an angry or disappointed. And if that wrath or grief is for anyone it is for those and for us when I instill fear into another such that they are too afraid to use their gifts.

We are called to risk what we have, to risk failure and imperfection. To risk migrant ministries even when we don't have all the answers. To risk opening our doors to those who our faith has historically or traditionally excluded or even reviled. And the consequence of not taking those risks is this. That when we are asked how we helped the least of these, when we are asked if we loved others, that we embraced the entirety of who we thought we were, that we say we wanted to but were afraid.

We live in a world that instills that fear. That told little girls years ago that they could only be mothers or spouses, when they felt a call to the clergy or to any other passion that was historically precluded. We live in a world where people are not welcomed because of their sexuality or gender or skin color or politics.

And I beg you right now, for the gifts that we have as a community, please help one another and me make this church a place where we don't live in fear. Instead we live into that risk. I'm not saying we won't hurt each other, we DEFINETLY will. But let's try to stick with and want to understand one another. For all your brokenness, for all the mistakes and sins you've made, THAT'S why we have Jesus, the god-man who conquered sin to say that you are not defined by your limitations but rather by your good. And as long as you use what good you have, I promise you, you will have it in abundance. Amen.