

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 1, 2008

Lessons: Psalm 31:1-5, 19-24; Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28; Romans 1:16-17, 3:22b-31; Matthew 7: 21-29

#### IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

Today is the third Sunday in the season of Pentecost, the longest season in the Church year. Last Sunday we considered that it is in this Season of Pentecost when we really focus on how we live out our lives as Christians. We focus on how we live as Jesus' disciples today. And last week we also remembered that we, just like Jesus' disciples before us, have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to do what God is calling us to do.

Last Sunday we heard Jesus ask: “*“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”* This morning we heard him say: “*“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”* And remember that in the twenty fifth chapter of Matthew Jesus tells us that in as much as we do certain things for those in need, we do them for him. Things like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving water to the thirsty, visiting the sick and those in prison and helping provide housing. But Jesus also reminded us that when we refuse to do those things to those in need, we refuse to do them for him.

It is important to acknowledged that, as individuals and as a church, we have been trying to do what Jesus calls us to do by being “Instruments of Peace” each day. But then we asked if perhaps there was something else that we are being called to do. So we agreed that during our daily prayers and quiet times we would seek God’s guidance over the next few weeks.

To open our imaginations a bit, listen to the words of our Presiding Bishop from the book “*A Wing and a Prayer*”. The bishop writes:

*“A talent was an enormous sum in Jesus’ day. It represented a weight of gold, something like seventy-five pounds, or a lifetime’s wages for a laborer—hundreds of thousands of dollars. An enormously wealthy master had gone off on a long trip and left his three servants in charge of his fortune. The one who had charge of five talents doubled the investment. The one who was in charge of two talents doubled his allotment, too. But the servant who was given one talent only returned what he was originally given. The master says to the first two servants, ‘Enter into the joy of your master,’ but the third is called wicked and lazy for not making more of his talent.*”

*“An old rabbinical story tells about what happens when a person dies. Moses meets the person and asks just one question of judgment, ‘Have you enjoyed everything God gave you to enjoy?’”*

*“That’s closer to what Jesus is talking about in the parable about the talents. What have you done with what you’ve been given?”*

*“That word ‘talent’ originally meant this vast sum of money, but it has come into our language with a far richer connotation of skills and gifts and abilities. Is this parable about money, or is it about what we call talents today?”*

*“The Diocese of El Salvador is poor and rural, with five thousand Anglicans and six clergy gathered in seventeen congregations, and they know something about the devastation of hurricanes. It is a poor country and diocese, not much wealthier than Haiti, the very poorest country in our hemisphere...In late September of 2005, after hurricanes hit the Gulf Coast, the bishop of El Salvador promised that his diocese was going to contribute all of their income from that month to the relief work on the Gulf Coast. All of it, from every congregation in the diocese. Every penny. They know what it is to be the victims of natural disaster, and they are sharing what they have with others who have lost everything. Their knowledge of common suffering prompted a desire to share, and brings joy to all. The Bishop continues:*

*“Joy clearly has something to do with using well what we’ve been given, even risking everything we have. It means living with passion, for as the psalm says, we are like grass that is green in the morning but burnt to a crisp by dusk...”*

*“...That third servant...is afraid to get out of his shell of safety and live life with abandon.*

*“He admits that he’s afraid of what the master would do to him if he lost the talent. Fear seems to be an issue for lots of us. Fear of change, fear of risk, fear of failing or looking foolish. I’m reminded of what the angel says every time one appears in the Bible: ‘Fear not.’ And Jesus says, ‘Perfect love casts out fear.’ Fear gets in the way of abundant living and finding the joy we were created for.*

*“The third servant is told that even if he’d put the talent in the bank he would have found some joy. But to do nothing, not to even try to use it, brings him into that vision of judgment and loss... He had something, but he didn’t use it, and now he has nothing.*

*“We’ve all got enormous gifts. All of us. We may not have identical gifts, but we all have something that can be used to make more—to make more of life, more of God’s loving reality. Not to use that gift means we opt for the grim side of judgment, the day of the Lord. But it is our choice, our own decision, that brings that kind of judgment.*

*“Everywhere I look I see enormous gifts and talents. There are abundantly gifted people in every community, with mountains of golden ability.*

*“The gifts and talents that have been so abundantly showered on us are not ours alone. They are given to us with the understanding that we will act as stewards, guardians, and investors. We’re meant to invest them, to risk them, for the good of all. Joy and abundant life come when we’re willing to risk all that we have, to lay down our lives.*

*“God has not called us together here to ignore our gifts. At the very least we can collect interest, and better, we can act like venture capitalists. We’re asked to invest what we have in that great dream of God. A tiny fraction of our wealth can radically change the lives of one third of the world’s people. But it’s not going to happen unless we can act as one body—the Body of Christ, one family of God, one people of all the earth.*

*“We already have an inkling of what is possible when we work together. Think of what more you can do. Could you become a haven for under-occupied children in the hours after school closes? Might you teach more lonely elders about the abundant life to be found in community? Will you become a laboratory of love for families who are consumed by consumerism? All are possible, you can double your gifts and more, if you are willing to risk what you have.*

*“The parable of the talents might be titled, ‘Use it or lose it!’*

*“God is coming, and we never know when. Judgment comes whether we are ready or not, but judgment is always about our decisions. As the nineteenth-century Swiss philosopher Henri-Frederic Amiel put it, ‘Life is short and we have not much time to gladden the hearts of those who walk this way with us; so let us be swift to love and let us make haste to be kind.’ The Bishop concludes:*

*Let us be swift to love, to use every gift at hand in the service of love, and we, too, shall enter into the joy of God.”*

Is there something else that we are being called to do? Is it possible that God has something in mind for St. Francis to do, for you, for me? Is it possible that God is calling us to show his love to his world in a new and different way? As you think about that, listen to these words of J. B. Phillips:

*“Christianity is an invitation to true living, and its truth is only endorsed by actual experience...When a ‘person’ becomes a committed Christian... ‘they’ become (sometimes suddenly, but more often gradually) aware of a greatly enhanced meaning in life and of a greatly heightened personal responsibility.*

*“Beneath the surface of things as they seem to be, ‘they’ can discern a kind of cosmic conflict in which ‘they’ are now personally and consciously involved.*

*“‘They’ have ceased to be a spectator or a commentator and a certain small part of the battlefield is ‘theirs’ alone.”*

Is there something that we are being called to do, to be, that will show God’s love to his world?

This week, let’s continue to bring that question to our times of prayer and silence...to God. And let’s listen very carefully, every day, for an answer. AMEN

