

Sermon - 11-15-20
Ps 123; Jgs 4:1-7; 1 Thess 5:1-11; Mt 25:14-30
Bearing the Light of Christ

Last week, we heard from the Israelite General Joshua. He challenged his nation to return to trust and worship God, saying, "...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15). The problem, as always, is a nation that turns to the idols of the surrounding nations. His leadership marked the beginning of the era of the judges. After Joshua, the nation's judges were Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar. Then, God called Deborah, wife of Lapidoth, to judge Israel. (OT prophetesses: Miriam, Deborah, Hulda, Noadiah and Isaiah's wife – NT prophetesses: Anna and Phillip's daughters).

It was Deborah who convinced her husband, Hebrew sages tell us, to "furnish large wicks and oil for the lights of the sanctuary of Shiloh, which burned like torches. Such was the effect of this holy woman on everyone around her: spreading the light of Torah." (chabad.org accessed 11-12-20) Now the Torah (first five books of the OT) is the Word of God. And the Lord Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh. This was not revealed in Deborah's time, but has been made clear in the appearance of our Messiah. The Word of God – the Light of the world.

In today's Scripture, Deborah has a prophecy from God for General Barak, who commands the Israelite army. God says through Deborah that the cruel Canaanite general, Sisera, will be defeated in the Kishon River valley. Thus, the Canaanite occupation of their nation will be pushed back, and Barak will be a hero. It sounds great, but Barak wants the prophetess, Deborah, to ride out with him – why? Is he unsure of God? Unsure of himself? God's Word was fulfilled and there was victory, but Barak got no glory.

The Apostle Paul says that the power of God's will – revealed in the prophetic word – is not controlled by human agency. It is like the birth of a baby. A pregnant woman may say, "Sheesh, I don't want to do this right now." Well, when the hour arrives, the baby is going to be born – labor will begin. You might as well pack your toothbrush and comb and set the bag by the door. It may be at 3 p.m. or it may be at 3 a.m. You will not make the decision. It will be made for you. When the kingdom comes in its fullness, with Christ's appearance, the shout of command, the voice of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet – we pray to be awake and ready to meet Him. Paul assures us, and the Thessalonians, that we are "children of the light." We who have surrendered to Jesus – and who follow Him day-by-day – are prepared. He only encourages us to remain awake and be ready to go.

The parable before us today is the next to last parable Jesus gives us in Matthew's Gospel before he begins his journey to the cross. He knows what is about to come upon Him. He deeply desires to prepare His disciples not only for His departure, but much more, for the life of devotion to the Gospel message that must go around the world.

There are three managers who are given considerable sums of money – a talent, two talents and five talents respectively. The word, "talent" was a measure of weight in the 1st c AD. But it has entered modern language as a term for the abilities, gifts, graces that each of us possesses. We are free to lavish our time, energy and gifts as we see fit. We see the three managers living out their best judgment to use the gifts they have been given.

In modern terms, they look at the risk involved in making the most of the great gift the Master has given. If you hire an investment manager, they will advise you toward maximizing your assets – your capital – to the best advantage for what you want to accomplish. The managers who doubled their amount took great risk. They could have gone bust in the marketplace. But they prospered and had good results to show the Master. The one lazy manager was not willing to hustle up to make a showing before the Master returned. He just buried his talent.

The talents are not really material money. Just as the oil in the flasks of the five wise maidens was not lamp oil – but the oil of God's mercy. What is the greatest gift you have been given? What is the talent you are investing while the Master is away?

Your most precious gift may not be what you think it is. The great 17th century poet, John Milton, lost his sight in the middle of a great career. Yet, he wrote *Paradise Lost*, one of his finest poems, after he became blind. So, too Fanny Crosby did wonderful things for the Lord as a blind person, writing many excellent hymns and songs. In our own day, Joni Eareckson Tada has been an artist and an evangelist since a diving accident left her paralyzed from the neck down. We have Senator Tammy Duckworth from IL, and US Representative, Brian Mast of FL who lost limbs in combat, and have gone on to actively serve their nation. All these have brought light, not darkness, into the world.

The most precious gift you and I possess is to keep living and bringing the Light of Christ every- where we go. Our great gift is the Light we bear in our hearts. The Light of the World is the living Word of God – shared and told and retold especially to those who need encouragement and hope in the darkness. Amen.