

**Sunday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**24<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

**Call to worship**

Leader: Trust in the Lord at all times, O peoples of the earth!

**People: We will pour out our hearts before our God!**

Leader: God is your refuge and your strength, a very present help in trouble!

**People: We will trust and not be afraid.**

**Prayer of Adoration**

Almighty God, we gather here in your presence to worship you in spirit and in truth. We come here to pray, grateful for your love and compassion. Your Spirit, O God, fills us with life, faith and understanding. Everything we are, everything we have and everyone we love is a gift from you, and so we worship you as Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn 502 I, the Lord of sea and sky

**Prayer of Confession**

God of wind and fire, God of mercy and liberation, who can stand in your presence? You may rightly give judgement on kings and queens, on nobility as well as commoners. And yet you send prophets and apostles with words of warning, that we may turn from our errors and misdeeds, and turning from them, find mercy and liberation. Forgive our waste of time and of opportunities to improve our readiness for Christ's coming. Amen

**Assurance of Pardon**

L: Friends, hear the Good News! God did not create us to the terror of judgement but to the full attainment of liberation through Jesus Christ.

**P: We rejoice that God did not create us to the terror of judgement, but to liberation through Jesus Christ.**

L: Friends, believe the Good News!

**P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.**

## **Mission Capsule – Together, We are Making a Difference**

Presbyterian Sharing is about mission. It's about ministry. It's about working together to share the good news of the gospel in Canada and around the world. Through our gifts to Presbyterian Sharing, we revitalize churches and support innovative worship. We empower young people to grow in their faith, and prepare leaders to serve the church. We care for God's creation and advocate for human rights. We walk with Indigenous Peoples on a journey of healing and reconciliation. We work with international partners to support leadership development, Christian education and evangelism. And so much more! When we work together, we can accomplish more than we can imagine. Together, we are making a difference.

Children's time

Hymn 634 Will you come and follow me?

### **Readings**

Judges 4: 1-7

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Matthew 25: 14-30

Hymn 690 Fight the good fight

**Sermon: Getting the risk without the gift**

The gospel says, **“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them.”**

So the three servants are called together and the master divides his earthly substance among them, and then disappears. Just when they need him most for advice to tell them how best to invest the money entrusted to them, he's gone.

Servants one and two had great results. Now before we gang up on the third servant, let us try to put ourselves in his place. This servant, in one lump sum, was given a talent, which is equal to 15 years of labor. That's a lot of money. If you convert that into our currency and use the minimum wage it comes to \$360, 000. Picture that much money in \$20.00 bills. What would it be like to be given that much money in twenty dollar bills?

That servant couldn't wire the money to the bank and it wasn't a cheque. It was hard cash. How would you get all that money home? Well, a large garbage bag , one of the

reinforced plastic kind. Now, see yourself dragging that down the street, trying not to draw attention to yourself. Finally you get it home, close the curtains and start laying it out on the kitchen table. Now, what do you do with it? To avoid making any rash decisions, for the present at least, you will hide it.

It's getting late so you put it under the bed but you can't sleep. Every hour or so you're up checking the windows, making sure the doors are locked and generally being on edge. The next morning after little sleep you decide to bury it in the backyard. You gently place it in a bag and place the bag in a strong box. That night, after a miserable day, you sneak out to the backyard, dig a deep hole in the garden and bury the box.

You still worry and decide to erect a chain link fence around the garden. Your neighbors notice you spending a lot of time in the backyard. Finally the day comes when the master returns and you're the last to speak to the master since you had to do some digging in the backyard.

The first servant gave his report: You gave me the equivalent of 75 years of wages, and I doubled it. The master said, **"Well done, good and trustworthy servant. I will put you in charge of many things since you were trustworthy in a few things."**

The second servant came up and showed his doubled investment. **"Well done, you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master."**

Now the third servant arrives, dragging that big bag of money behind him. He is truly proud of himself. He didn't waste any of it on himself, he didn't buy any lottery tickets, in fact, it's all intact, every penny accounted for.

The servant says something about the master being a harsh man, reaping where he didn't sow, and gathering where he didn't scatter seed. Then he hands the bag of money to the master saying, **"I hid your talent in the ground, here it is, you have what is yours."** **"You wicked lazy servant,"** says the master. **"You knew did you, that I was harsh? Then you should have invested the money in the bank so I could have some interest. So take all of this wretch's money, clean the dirt off it and give it to the other servants."**

Then comes the last line, driving the nail home:

**"For to all those who have, more will be given and they will have abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."**

Honestly now, in the world we live in, is this a fitting text for a Christian sermon?

**“To those who have, they will get more. Those who have not, even the little they have will be taken away.”**

That sounds like some political platform. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer and that's the way it is! This gospel reading not only attacks the third servant's overly careful and miserly cautious action, it goes further as that line indicates.

This is a story about judgement. The master is holding us to account. There is a lot of judgement in this story. If God is a God of grace, then where is the grace in this story? The story is harsh, unyielding, and firm. Where is the grace in the master who is so harsh on this well-intentioned servant?

It would have been interesting if there was a fourth servant in the story, one who went, like the first two, invested what he was given, and when he returned said, Master it seemed like a sure thing. Everyone at the investment office said it was a sure bet. However, things didn't work out, so all I can do is say, I'm sorry.

What would Jesus have had the master say to that servant? I believe the Jesus we have come to know lifts up failures and has compassion on losers and all who fail. He said to the woman, **“Neither do I condemn you – go – sin no more.”**

He took failures and lifted them up, forgiving them and sending them on their way. But there isn't a fourth servant in the story, and the question remains, where is the grace?

If we look closely there is grace all over the story. It begins early on. The master before leaving gives the three servants, not some money, but his whole substance. He entrusted his entire property to them, which means everything he has.

This means that when he returns everything of who he is and everything of what he has is utterly dependent upon what they have done with who he is. Who is he? We see when the servants report back. If they blow it – he's blown it. So who is really at risk in this story?

It is the master, since he entrusted his whole life, everything he has to his servants. That trust is extravagant grace, for it is totally vulnerable to the behavior of another and therein is the grace.

He gave them his substance – his life - everything. It's a story Jesus told near the end, just before going on a journey to the cross. It has connections to that story in Luke's gospel about the father and the two sons. The father isn't mad at a son who went out and wasted his substance. To the older brother in that story, who was in a snit over the party for the prodigal, remember what the father said?

**“Son, all that I have is yours.”**

All means everything. Come on into the joy of the party. This is what the third servant didn't get. He missed it. He got the risk but he never got the gift. So if one senses only the risk but never gets the gift, the grace, then there is nowhere to go except to the backyard in fear.

Once the money was buried, there was no further decision to be made. It was over. No defeat, no possibility of victory, no joy, no sorrow, no grace, only a hole with a whole lot of money and the third servant standing over it. That hole is his grave. He comes back to the master saying, **“Here it is, it's all safe and sound.”**

The joke is on the servant because the master doesn't want what is his, since he blows it all on his servants. He simply wants them to get in the game, to become involved.

The first two servants get the risk and the gift. When they come to the master, they hear the word, **“You've been faithful over a little, I'll put you in charge of much.”**

They get the joy of experiencing the extravagant grace of the master, and the way he wants business carried out. He is still looking for those who will risk and embrace the gift.

### **Prayers**

O God, we are mindful of the gifts and talents you give to us humans. In so many parts of life those gifts and talents have produced great things and we are thankful for them. You urge us, O God, to pray for the whole human family your son, Jesus, came to live with, who died and rose to new life, so we, too, may have that life.

O God, may the purpose for which you created us, to serve you and one another in love and compassion be attained through your grace and Spirit. Hear us, O God, as we pray for the people in the world today ruled by tyrants and bullies, who have long forgotten, if they ever knew, that they are accountable to you for what they were given.

O God, grant us the vision to see our treasure as a gift from you for redeeming the world. Give us the courage to dig it up, dust it off, and share it with your people, and we will daily return to you a greater treasure than we received.

Hear our prayers for the sick in our church family and beyond. Grant to all in our church family and beyond, the faith and courage to cope with the pandemic that we see and experience daily. Now we pray that we might be clothed in the armor of faith and love, and be given for a helmet the hope of salvation. We pray this in the name of the One who was the Way, the Truth and the Light, who taught us to say.....the Lord's Prayer....

Hymn 721 All who love and serve your city

### **Commissioning/Benediction**

People of Christ, encourage and build up one another. Strengthen the faint hearted, lift up the weak, be patient with the anxious, and rejoice in all circumstances. The one who calls you is faithful; the God of Peace shall make you whole.