

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
November 13, 2011
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: Faithful in Much

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 Matthew 25:14–30

It is the time of year when the preparation for special events just about overwhelms us. This can be true if the family Thanksgiving dinner is at our house or the Christmas reunion is to be held under our roof. Maybe we have been chosen to be the host because as Jesus said, “For to all those who have, more will be given.” Or, in other words if we have shown ourselves to be responsible or faithful in carrying out tasks given to us, more will be given to us. We can be trusted to be prepared. We are “Faithful in Much.”

Now before we get our minds running too fast on Thanksgiving and Christmas preparations, there is another often overlooked celebration in the church year that is fast approaching. Next week is Christ the King Sunday. It is when the church celebrates Christ being the King of all creation and his anticipated return to earth. We do not know when Christ will return. Only God knows. Yet, as we will hear in the interpretation of the scriptures, when Christ returns he expects to find us being faithful in all that he has given us to do as his disciples. He wants us to be “Faithful in Much.”

How shall we prepare for the return of the King of all creation, or be “Faithful in Much?” Actually, some of your faithful preparation was demonstrated when you got ready for worship this morning. I suspect that most of you took valuable time to bathe, decide what clothes to wear, and thought about worship and whom you might see at church. Those of you who have children and prepared them for church must have had a plan in mind despite the resistance you might have met. I really appreciate the effort you make to be here with your families. I hope that there was love, joy and happiness mixed into your preparations for worship as you were “Faithful in Much.”

As we review the parable in Matthew we will hear that our being prepared or “Faithful in Much” has earthly and eternal consequences. As you heard in the background to the Gospel reading, a talent was worth up to 20 times the yearly wages of a day laborer. The master took a huge risk entrusting his money to his slaves.

Let us listen to a retelling of this parable that substitutes maid servants for the male slaves and a mistress for the master. “And the mistress of the household, needing to travel out of town for her business, called her three maid servants together. To each of the three she gave a bag of gold and told them to do with it as they saw best. The first woman used the money to buy some property and rented it out, doubling the value of it. She was known as the first woman in her area to even own land and the people saw this and pondered it. The second woman used her money to set up a plush clothing shop. She purchased lush materials from the sages and business people who traveled through her town on the camels. Both townspeople and visitors knew the riches of her shop and she, too, increased her wealth.”

“But the last woman, the one who had been given one bag of gold, was terrified. So she hid it under bed. She was consumed with worry about what people would think if

they knew she had the gold. What would her husband do? Her sisters and brothers would probably want a share of it. The village synagogue folk might say to her that she was getting out of line for being a woman of means and she would lose her friends. So the gold stayed where it was. When the mistress of the house returned and heard the first two stories of wealth, she was delighted.” “Emphasis” Nov/Dec. 96 pg. 26- Susan K. Hedahl

The results were quite different when the mistress heard the report of the third woman. The third woman had done nothing with the gold because she was afraid of the mistress. In this woman's mind, the mistress was a mean, hard and greedy businesswoman. The third woman did not love nor respect her mistress. But, in fact the mistress was generous to a fault. She was deeply grieved and angry. She took that bag of gold and divided it among the first two women who had used the wealth wisely. Then she turned to the third maid.... at this point consider with me some of the options that were open to the mistress? She could fire this woman and send her out into the streets, homeless and penniless. She could demote her and reduce her pay. She might re-educate her, get her counseling and give her another chance. What would do you with this woman? What if this third woman represents how we see God and misuse the gifts and talents he has given us? What if we are not “Faithful in Much?”

"All of us have some sort of talent. It consists of strength in some area of our personality. For some people, a talent is outstanding, such as having a beautiful singing voice. For others, it is having an unusually good memory or physical strength and ability. Everyone, to one degree or another, has the capacity of doing something worthwhile. Even a caring attitude about others can be included.” Unfortunately there are people who do not exhibit even a caring attitude about others. The fearful selfish third slave in Jesus’ parable is such an example. Another example has been found in “a man named Luigi Tarisio, who when he died, was found to possess 246 violins. They represented a lifetime of collecting. They were found stored everywhere throughout his house-in the attic, in closets, even in dresser drawers. But none were ever played; they were simply collected, His passionate devotion to the violin had robbed the world of all the music those instruments could have produced. Our talents are not to be concealed; rather they are to be used for some good.” We are to be “Faithful in Much.” “Emphasis”

Nov/Dec. 96 pg. 26, Harold Lentz

In the parable on the talents, Jesus is warning us not to be like the third slave or people like Luigi. He is also giving us notice that this life we have now is our one big chance to develop and share his gift of faith in him and our God given talents in word and deed with others. His life, death and resurrection give the gifts of faith and talents their incomprehensible value. Every moment we breathe we have another opportunity in this life to invest this faith and these talents wisely, so we are given countless chances. It is from the depth of the love of his heart Jesus pleads with us not to waste or hid away what he has so graciously given to us. This parable should raise the questions in us, how much do we love and respect the Lord who has been so generous to us? And, are we prepared to risk and share what he has given us with others? At the end of our lives, which could come at any time, we could lose it all if we not prepared to allow the Holy Spirit to multiply and share the gifts of faith and talents God in Jesus Christ has given to us. Again, this life we live now is our only chance to be “Faithful in Much” for the Lord.

According to Jesus, our not being “Faithful in Much” can lead to the weeping and gnashing of teeth as in the case of those who misused or did not invest the gift of faith God gave to them. This tragic scenario reminds me of a group of “Christians” in the 1990’s who decided that they knew when Christ was to return. They quit their work, sold all they had and moved to a dark cave, which was stocked with supplies to help them survive until the last day. They also had weapons to kill anyone who tried to get in the cave with them. How Christ-like is that? When the predicted day of the Lord's return came and went, they were devastated. They no longer had belongings, jobs, homes, food, water, and they also had no faith. What they had invested their faith and material goods in was false. They had consigned themselves to emptiness, nothingness, the weeping and gnashing of teeth. There was another case where the leader of such a group took all the money of the people and invested it in a bank certificate. He had told them that the world would end in October of that year, but authorities learned that the certificate would not come due until the next May. End of the world indeed! The leader did not even believe his teachings and scammed the people. Oh there was the weeping and gnashing of teeth amongst those people who were not “Faithful in Much” and cared only about themselves. Again, the truth is no one knows when Christ will return, but we know he has told us to be prepared.

Paul emphasized the same preparedness and generosity to the church in Thessalonica. He wrote that Christ would return like a thief in the night. In the time of Paul and Jesus the night was a scary time. There were no streetlights, flashlights or headlights, just small oil lamps. Nighttime was near complete darkness when clouds covered the sky to hide the stars and the moon. A thief could sneak in easily. Paul was saying that when Jesus returns we will not even see him coming contrary to those who think they know all the signs of his return.

Fortunately, Paul turns all this speculation into a positive vein in reminding the people of Thessalonica that because of what Jesus did for them, and their faith in him, they were no longer children of darkness where evil prevails. There was no need to fearfully hide in a dark cave for they were all children of light and children of the day; not of the night or of darkness. They were not to fall asleep and become unprepared for the return of Christ. But, since they belonged to the day, they were to stay awake, and “put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.” They were to be wide-awake Christians who were prepared to faithfully carry the mission of Jesus Christ even to the darkest corners of the world. They were to do this by generously sharing his love, light and message of salvation in word and deed. Yes, even unto those fearfully and selfishly hiding in caves.

Living in such a Christ-like manner was “A woman from Paris, who was poor and blind. One day she put 27 francs into the offering plate. “But you cannot afford so much,” said her friend. “Yes, I can” she answered. When pressed to explain, she said, “I am blind. So I asked my fellow straw-workers how much they spent in a year for their oil lamps when it is too dark to work. They told me, 27 francs. So I found out that I save at least 27francs in a year, because I am blind and do not need a lamp to work. I give the 27 francs to shed light to where there is darkness in the world.””

As the modern day children of light and the day, Jesus Christ has set us loose to be his servants who are “Faithful in Much:” And who freely share the talents of faith and material goods God has given us to multiply the joy of the kingdom of God to the world. In living as God’s good and faithful servants, we not only prepare ourselves, but also others for the return of Christ the King of all creation. The baptism of Brody James Kaufman or any child is a perfect illustration of what it means to be prepared to be “Faithful in Much” for the Lord and to prepare another person for the return of Christ the King of all creation.

In baptism, the parents must be prepared to answer the following question in the affirmative: Relying on God’s grace, do you promise to live the Christian faith, and to teach that faith to your child? The Kaufmans have been doing this with their children. As a congregation we must be prepared to answer this question in the affirmative: Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture this child by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging her/him to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church? When one considers all that is included in these vows and how many years may involved in raising a child, we gain a vision of: What it means to be “Faithful in Much” for the Lord and for this child: And the devotion of time, talents, gifts it takes on our part to prepare the child for the return of Christ the King of all creation. This has been true for all of us, and the well prepared and “Faithful in Much” people who raised us in the faith.

Just as there were risks for the slaves in Matthew who invested what had been given to them, there are risks in what we pour out to our children. But it is worth it when we realize as Paul did: “God has destined us not for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.” Let us be wide awake and “Faithful in Much” as we look forward to the return of Christ the King of Creation.