

Sermon

What does Faithfulness look like in a time of waiting?

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Today's scripture from Matthew immediately follows last week's scripture of the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. We talked about the importance of keeping our reserves up – even when the waiting seems excessive or its unclear when things will change or improve – kind of like now, right? How many times have you said recently, I can't wait until we can get back to normal life again – you know, the life we had before that we complained about – that life seems pretty good right about now. But let's face it – none of us, not the scientists, doctors – no one really knows when this waiting game will be over or what the end game will look like.

As I explained as I read our scripture, in Matthew 25, Talents, large sums of money. A talent is worth about 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius is a common laborer's daily wage, a talent would be roughly equivalent to 20 years wages for the average worker. This gives you a sense of just how much money this is. Now everyone else in my immediate family – my siblings, all work for sales companies and they are account managers, vice presidents – and I was always amazed when they would tell me their sales quotas - \$10 million a week. And like these slaves, they are expected to take that product and turn it into profit for their company.

Now unlike my siblings, my grandparents lived very differently. My grandparents had a modest home in Kenmore – it was a nice house, 3 bedrooms, sunporch like so many Kenmore homes. And I always loved it as a child because it

had beautiful oak woodwork everywhere like so many of those old homes do. But throughout my entire childhood, they had the same furniture, same stove, fridge, dishes. They were frugal people. They were products of their upbringing. My grandfather maybe made it through 5th or 6th grade. His mother died very young of the flu during the Spanish flu pandemic. And his father worked for the railroad so he wasn't home very much. My grandfather got a job with New York Telephone and he worked for them until he retired. My grandparents lived through the great depression and it really showed. They used the same napkin everyday for about a week. They reused tea bags and as I said, rarely bought anything new unless it was absolutely necessary. They didn't attend church during my lifetime but they were very faithful people. They talked of their faith and later in life they hooked into Oral Roberts and followed him. They even went to see him in Oklahoma – first and last time they ever went on a plane.

From all accounts, they were a humble people. Yet when they passed and my parents were cleaning out the house – we found everything from their lives – my grandfather's white, now yellowed, NY Tel work shirts still hung in the attic, starched and pressed. And as they cleaned the house out, they found stashes of cash everywhere – in the mattress, under carpets, tucked in the back of drawers. And that was nothing compared to the stock portfolio and bank account my grandfather left that nobody knew existed. When my mother inherited this estate, she gave much of it away – some to us, she helped me buy my first house – to my brother and my sister, to many charities and she even sold my grandparent's house to one of my dear friends for under market value so she could have her own home. It was beautiful to watch.

Like the slave who buried the talent he was given, my grandparents let that abundance sit under rugs and in a mattress for years. So many people are hurting right now, some have been out of work for months – unemployment is running out...but some of us are doing ok, and some are flourishing. So I wonder – are we keeping too much of our talents, our denarii, our dollars. Yet, when we share our gifts, when we give – incredible things happen that just can't happen when we keep it to ourselves.

I purchased a Bible recently, actually two – one for Laila for her confirmation and one for me...and probably the day after I purchased it, I misplaced mine. I looked everywhere for it – multiple times. Now I live in a house with a lot of people so things get moved around – I asked everyone to keep an eye out for it...and the other night, like I had every single day since I misplaced it, I went down to my office in my basement and looked around for it yet again. Then I sat at my desk and I said quietly out loud, “God, where is my Bible?” And I turned my head gently to the right and I looked at a box that has been sitting in that spot for sometime...and so I got up and there was a lot of things in the box but at the bottom was my Bible. Do you ever do that? Ask God to help you with something and as long as your truly receptive, he answers. I love those moments because it reminds me how close God really is and how much God loves me.

Now is the time of year when we traditionally ask you to think about your contribution to the church and consider what you might want to contribute for the remainder of the year and pledge for next year and maybe your thinking – I really need to be careful here. After all we're waiting for this pandemic to come to some sort of end – we don't know how long that's going to be – there's a lot of

uncertainty. And we have to be careful about our oil while we wait...that's true. It is a pandemic after all – I mean what are we expected to do really.

Well - pandemic or no – waiting for things to get back to normal – or not – these 230 operation Christmas Child boxes are going to be shipped all over the world – likely the only gift these children will get. The City Mission is serving more meals than ever – and we will be part of that with your contributions to fill the pantry. And children and families will reach to the Salvation Army again this year to help them with gifts for their children – and we will be part of that too with our contributions of toys and gifts as part of the White Christmas giving program.

So we have a choice – while we wait – we can hide our abundance under a mattress, or tucked in the back of a drawer – or we can do something different. We stand upon generations of the faithful here at Bacon Memorial. You know, this church was established here in Niagara Falls in 1922...when some faithful families decided this probably surrounded by corn fields or wheat fields – that this would be a good place and a good time to set down roots and start a new church...in 1922, right at the tail end of Spanish Flu pandemic. It's not easy to start a church from the ground up – not then and not now – but they took what they had and with gratitude and a fire of faith – they did it. And look, here we sit, 99 years later – in another pandemic – ready and willing to do the same. To contribute, to honor and to emulate the ministry of Jesus. Jesus announced the arrival of God's kingdom by feeding the hungry, curing the sick, blessing the meek and serving the least. And this – the ministries of this church – this is what faith looks like in a time of waiting. Our oil reserves are not tucked away and hidden – when we give like this, God takes our modest means and makes them into

something magnificent. Let us honor those incredible, faithful, hopeful people that sat around a kitchen table during a pandemic and said let's start a church. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Amen