

Pentecost 24A

November 19, 2014

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18      3 short chapters: 1) doom; 2) beg the Lord to save you; 3) God will save.

Psalm 90:1-12

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11      The day of the Lord will come without warning, but you are children of light.

Matthew 25:14-30      The parable of the Talents; five/five, two/two, one/none

To all who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but for those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

I grew up in a culture that some of you might connect with:

A child is to be seen, and (not heard)

Don't speak to an adult unless (you are spoken to)

I remember as a child, my father taking me with him to the garage he used for service on our car. One of the owners asked 'who is this with you?'. My father said, 'This is one of my tax deductions'.

This culture taught me to stay quiet, and to believe I should never think I am very good at anything. In language as a Christian, I learned to ignore God's gifts in me. Years later, when I was an applications engineer, supporting sales, one of the sales team, a friend, said to me, 'You seriously underestimate what skills you have. You should claim and use more of what you are capable of.' That short comment changed me. It wasn't bragging to use skills, if they are used to bring glory and honor to God. He didn't talk about the God part, but I knew that was what his comment was meant to say to me.

The master in our Gospel lesson went away, and expected his servants to make good use of what resources he had left with them. But in reality, this story from Jesus says that they should have been risk takers; you and I should be risk takers, making the most use out of all the skills, time, money, and other resources that God has assigned to us. The concept of "stewardship" we talk about this time of year is about being intentionally creative in using the resources, gifts and skills that God has given us.

The parable of the Talents says that those who wisely use what God has abundantly given them will have an abundance; the others will not. When we follow God's lead here at St Luke's, we operate a preschool based on Christian values - without apology. We make sure Hollister knows we are here, and what values motivate us. We participate in community events creatively— like the beer and wine stroll, Decorate a tree, Kids in the park, and the biker rally - We use them all to witness about our faith and about our faith community. Look at the blessings that have resulted; a strong preschool with a great reputation across the city, changing lives; a child wanting a

Bible for home, a child seeing me at Lucky's and shouting out 'Hi, Fr. Ken'. Look at the blessings upon this church; living within our financial means while being a growing presence in Hollister; doing in important ministries to Chamberlains, the Food Bank, and fire victims in Santa Rosa area. We open to the community Rev Ardyss' Journeys at Advent, Lent and Summer, and have participants from other churches and with no church affiliation.

Zephaniah's ministry was 25 years before Israel was taken into captivity and relocated in Babylon. His words express the deep frustration God felt. The warning of Zephaniah was for Israel to use the gift of their relationship with God, to bring glory to God. The lesson from Jesus parable of the talents is the disappointment of the master when the one slave did not use what was entrusted to him to bring returns to the master, but went and buried it.

God entrusts us with people we love and who love us back. God entrusts us with skills that give us earnings that allow us to live comfortably and to bless others who are not so fortunate. He entrusts some of us with children; and some with young ones who look to us as role models. God entrusts us with health, wealth, intelligence, relationships, and life in this great country.

Each of us has a responsibility to our creator to be sure we are not burying the gifts we've been given. Our guidance comes from the slave who was given 10 talents; who invested it wisely and returned 20 talents to his master. How can you invest what God has given you, so that it brings a return of glory back to God.

The challenge before us is to continually be on the lookout, and to act in bold and creative ways to invest our blessings back into our community and into the world, accomplishing everything for the glory of God's Kingdom.

Our theme for this fall's pledge campaign is Living Generously; reinvesting with generosity what God has provided. This is the deepest meaning of effective stewardship.

Amen.