

"With What We've Been Given"
November 15, 2020; 10:00 am
Matthew 25:14-30
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

The Parable of the Talents

¹⁴ "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, ¹⁶ to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master

replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?' ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents.

²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

NEW DAY—UNRAVELING

The old threads are unraveling,
Get your needles ready.
We are stitching a new quilt
of Humanity.

We have a country, actually a whole world, to stitch back together. We have become unraveled. As a people. As a human race.

Not just since *this* election season, by any means. Not just since recent years of increased polarization—say, since 9/11. Not just since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's event!

We have been unraveling as humanity for centuries!

Really, since Cain killed Abel and tried to deny it. Hid his face from God. Asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Since Noah's son Ham was cursed and that became the ludicrous curse and undoing of all humankind of

brown and black skin down through the ages—
SUPPORTED by the Church!

Since Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright.
Since countries and states and tribes conquered each
other and enslaved, raped, and pillaged their fellow
human men and women on this earth.

Since the first black body was captured on African
shores and shipped like cargo to America, to be bought
and sold as chattel—treated like cattle—or likely worse!

Treated as anything BUT a Beloved Child of God,
Imago Dei—created in the Image and Likeness of our
Creator.

We have forgotten that timeless truth from the native
spiritual tradition: the Right Wing and the Left Wing
belong to the same bird! And, if one goes down, the
whole bird crashes to the ground.

We have been unraveling for a very, very long time.
We now must turn that around—repent, change
directions—re-stitch, bind up, weave together—stop the
unraveling!

We have no choice but to stitch ourselves back together
again—with God’s help! With God’s *expectation* really—
God’s command upon us—“Love.Your.Neighbor. I
wasn’t joking. That wasn’t a hint. It was a command.”

SEAMLESS GARMENT—WHOLE CLOTH

In the 1980’s, Cardinal Bernardin, a prominent leader
in the Catholic Church, proposed an image of the
Church Universal as a “seamless garment.” He and
other church leaders since then have exhorted
Christians everywhere to have a “consistent ethic of

life.” To see all “life issues” as interconnected, and
apply the same principles to a range of life issues.

From abortion concerns to child poverty and hunger,
to immigration, to the death penalty, to end of life
support and care. *All* interconnected. No “picking and
choosing,” as if one “life issue” is more important
than another.

Pope Francis said: “The world is already so torn and
divided, brokenness is now everywhere. Consequently,
the church, ‘**the seamless garment of the Lord,**’ cannot
allow herself to be rent, broken or fought over.”

All life is intertwined.

So, as much as we are unraveled to a point, we are
also interdependent, intertwined, stitched out of the
same, whole cloth.

So, what we must do in these unraveling times is to
find our way home. Come together, with God’s help
into that seamless garment again.

Too much to hope for you, you ask? It starts with
ONE stitch. One tiny step.

This is not too much for us. This is something we ALL
can do. One stitch. One step. One stitch that turns
into one row, one section, one piece of the quilt. One
step that turns into a few steps, and then a walk, and
then a march—and becomes a journey. Toward love
and justice. Toward humanity’s walking *together*.

Right now. Today. Right here. To gather up the
differing threads of *our* lives, *our community*,
different-feeling fabrics, different colors of skin and
experience and weave, stitch, sew, knit, crochet,

needlepoint, mold as clay, form, re-form, whatever you know how to do! Or learn a new skill if you don't!

To Sing in harmony AND melody—at the same time!

The first step is: Just start. The world needs you. The world needs us. Every one of us.

MAKING AND HOLDING SPACE FOR ONE ANOTHER

¹⁴ “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents,^[a] to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

The second step is a little more complex.

We have to make space and hold safe space for each other's talents. To honor their approach to the project – especially if it is different from ours. To “grant agency” like the landowner, when he entrusted each of them to take and do what they could with the resources, the gifts.

“Here, take what you've been given—the talents, skills, energies—and see what you can DO with them. See what God leads you to do with your token, your gift.”

We cannot dictate to others how they are to put their talents and lives to God's purposes. We are challenged not to look askance if their stream is not the mainstream. Or even heading quite the same direction as our stream!

It's a time and place to honor each other's paths. We incline toward putting each other in a box—wanting to decide how the other servants should put their talents to use. To Second-guess what God would want for other AND ourselves—in terms of fully engaged spiritual life and service.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

Let me tell you my story.

I have struggled with this throughout ministry and life. I imagine we all have! I have been asked over the years if I have “changed since you came.” Yes, I have. I have grown and stretched and come to new understandings of the Gospel and the human condition. And, as a result of that growth, I cannot spend another day keeping silent about things that matter.

God compels me to use my insights, talents, passions and convictions in a particular way—even waking me up in the night—which She did as I was writing this message! Waking me up in the night, hearing the cries of God's people! Telling me how I am to minister to those who are crying out. Wherever place and space I find myself in.

In the depths of my being, in what wakes or keeps me up at night, I am called to preach and teach **love and justice**. The extravagant, unconditional love of God for ALL God's children. And, I am convicted! Compelled to care about what God cares about—throughout scripture and revelation into this present day and hour.

That's the Gospel! As God has led me to understand it. That we are urged to a greater understanding—continually—of who is our neighbor—and how do we best love *every* neighbor and gather them into our ever-widening circle. That question and working it out every day, in my thought, is the purpose of the Church—its very reason for existence.

And, that is not always wholly received by others. God might be “still speaking” to them in different ways. And that's okay!

My heart has been literally broken open in this multiple pandemic season! Broken open to the pain and suffering of those on the margins—not in the mainstream—in ways it never has before—more so than I've ever been woken to this suffering of my brothers and sisters, in my entire life.

I can't NOT respond. Can't Not share that conviction that God is calling ALL of us to care deeply. To wake up! To multiply the talents, response and gifts. To call one another to work alongside in more profound ways, in solidarity with the poor and the outcast unlike we ever have before.

I am called to be an “Expander”—One of the spiritual gifts God has given me is to encourage us *all* to open and stretch our hearts and minds, our eyes and ears to the expansive love of God—and our understanding of who needs to be included in that expanding vision, love and extravagant embrace.

So, know that if I encourage us *all* to grow, stretch, expand our understandings of God and the world; I *do* that out of love and compassion—*not* to be divisive,

but to build a bigger Table. A more wholesome and welcoming Quilt of Humanity.

For, I believe we are all called to *expansion*, by Jesus. As a spiritual practice. As individuals. As the Church of Jesus Christ.

And, as I believe that, I also know that your understanding of the Gospel might be different. Your stitches you bring to the quilt; your particular color and texture of cloth might vary from mine, and isn't that wonderful?!

The old threads are unraveling,
Get your needles ready.
We are stitching a new quilt
of Humanity.
Bring your old t-shirts,
worn out jeans, scarves,
antique gowns, aprons,
old pockets of plenty
who have held Earth's treasures,
stones, feathers, leaves,
love notes on paper.
Each stitch
A mindful meditation.
Each piece of material
A story.
The more colour the better,
so call in the Tribes.
Threads of browns, whites,
reds, oranges
Women from all nations
start stitching.

Let's recycle the hate, the abuse,
the fear, the judgment.

Turn it over, wash it clean,
ring it out to dry.
It's a revolution
of recycled wears.
Threads of greens, blues, purples
Colourful threads
of peace, kindness,
respect, compassion
are being stitched
from one continent to the next
over forests, oceans, mountains.
The work is hard
Your fingers may bleed.
But each cloth stitched together
Brings together a community.
A world, our future world
Under one colourful quilt.
The new quilt of humanity.

(~ Julia Myers; Artist: Paula Nicho Cumez)

HOW IS GOD CALLING YOU?

How is God, the Holy One, making *you* new?
Breaking open your heart? Breaking you out of your
mold. Breaking open your mind to consider things—
ideas, perspectives, understandings—you never have
before?

Where are your fingers bleeding because the work is
so hard—stitching such very different threads, fabrics,
colors together into something recycled, re-purposed,
reconnected—since the days of creation —into a new,
beautiful quilt of community; of humanity?

INTO THE JOY WITH THE MASTER

¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants came
home. They all came to him, reported on their various

investment strategies, brought the returns and told
their stories of abundance or scarcity. And the
Landowner said, regardless of the profit margin:
'Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have
been trustworthy with what you were given—what you
had to work with. I will put you in charge of many
things; enter into the joy of your master.'

And likewise, our Creative Creator says to us:
“Well done, good and faithful ones—entrusted with
much or little—faithful with what you’ve been given.
Enter into the joy!”

“Come, walk alongside me, my Child, we are in this
together. We will multiply ALL our gifts and talents—
journey and rejoice together—in ways we have yet to
imagine! Come, let’s share the joy and love of God
and one another! Amen.