

**22<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**NOVEMBER 13, 2011**

**"USE IT OR LOSE IT"**

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One Sunday morning the pastor surprised the congregation by saying, *"I don't want anyone in this Church to ever spend another nickel!"* He went on to explain that they were being asked to bring all their nickels to Church to help buy hot lunches for children in Haiti. A gallon jar was placed at the entrance to the Church to collect the coins.

One of the first graders from that Church was in math class in school when the teacher asked her what coins she would give if she bought something that cost 32 cents. She answered, "A quarter and seven pennies." Her teacher came back by saying, "But wouldn't a quarter, a nickel and two pennies be better?" "Oh, no!" She said, "We don't spend nickels at my house. Nickels go to feed hungry children."

*"Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."*

Three guys are given a chunk of their master's money. Two handle it well! One shows up with a return-on-investment that reminds us of our current economy. It might actually have been better to bury it in the ground than to try and invest it! We have the pleasure of hearing this parable every three years. This parable has been used to start up building campaigns. It has been used to rally financial support for missionaries. And it has even been used to plead for volunteers in the work of the Church. But today is not just about the dollar signs, or the stewardship campaign, or the state of the economy. In the bigger picture, today is about the blessings we have received, the time we are given and the blessing that we can be. My new favorite prayer: *Help us to live simply, so that others can simply live.*

OH, YA! And don't let me forget... today is also about the END OF TIME! Here is a run-down of today's theme as we hear it in the appointed parts of our liturgy.

In the PRAYER OF THE DAY we pray: *"PREPARE US FOR THE JOY OF THE DAY OF YOUR COMING."*

In the first lesson the Prophet Zephaniah says: *"THE DAY OF THE LORD IS AT HAND."*

In the PSALM we already spoke these words: *"TEACH US TO NUMER OUR DAYS."*

St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: *"YOU YOURSELVES KNOW VERY WELL THAT THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT."*

The parable in today's Gospel is Jesus' answer to the question the Disciples ask: *"TELL US, WHEN WILL THIS BE, AND WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING AND OF THE END OF THE AGE?"*

And even in the INTERCESSIONS there is not escape: *"EVERLASTING GOD, STIR YOUR CHURCH TO BE EVER VIGILANT AND AWAKE. DELIVER US FROM EVERY FEAR AND DISTRACTION, THAT WE MIGHT BE FOUND FAITHFUL ON THE DAY OF THE LORD."*

NO ESCAPE! AND NO SLEEPING IN CHURCH! Glad we've got that cleared up!

We need to hear this parable again! But we need a fresh take on it. We are blessed! What will we do with our blessings? Whether our blessings are 5 or 2 or 1, what will we do, with the blessings that God has given us! The assignment is to count our blessings, and the challenge is to take our blessings and be a blessing to others.

And the bottom line is this: USE IT OR LOSE IT! And believe me, that sounds a whole lot better than Jesus' last words: *THROW THEM INTO THE OUTER DARKNESS, WHERE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH.*" No thank you!

The message behind Jesus' parable about the giving of the talents and the investing of talents, is a story about life and stewardship. Jesus sets the stage with the introduction to this parable. *"A man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability."*

These "TALENTS" are not skills and abilities as we would use the word. These "TALENTS" are pieces of the man's property. Today we might think of them as stocks or bonds or shares in the company. And so we might say that each servant is given a portion of the business. But the most important lines in this introduction are: *"ENTRUSTED TO THEM"* and *"TO EACH ACCORDING TO THEIR ABILITY."*

And when we take this parable into our lives, the message is very simple. Each of us has been ENTRUSTED with SKILLS and RESOURCES according to our ABILITIES. No one is left out! Each of us is blessed! Each and every one of us has been given something that can be used IN God's kingdom and FOR God's kingdom.

God knows WHAT we can do, and God has given us the stuff to do it! Now... what are we going to do with it?

As we approach Advent, we not only prepare for Christ's coming as a Child born in Bethlehem, but we also prepare for Christ's coming at the end of all time. Now, I'm not going to try and predict WHEN that will be or HOW that will happen. Someone else tried that recently, in fact he even tried it twice. And he failed twice! GET THE POINT! WE ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW!

That's not the point! In fact the point is exactly the opposite. If we sit around and try to figure out why the world is in such rough shape and if we look at all the things that are happening around us as the signs that the end is near, we are the most foolish of all. For Jesus Himself said, even He does not know when that will be, only the Father knows. If we spend our time calculating on the basis of what we think we read in scripture, we are wasting our time! AND THAT IS TIME THAT SHOULD BE SPENT INVESTING THE TALENTS THAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN.

We have been given a set amount of skills and treasure. And whether it be 5 or 2 or 1, we must use them as God intended them to be used. And the last entry into the formula is "TIME." God has also given each of us a set amount of time. And in the time that God has given us, we must make the most of the blessings that He has given us. USE IT OR LOSE IT!

ASK ANYONE ABOUT HOW MUCH MONEY A RICH PERSON LEAVES BEHIND WHEN THEY DIE. THE ANSWER IS ALWAYS THE SAME: ALL OF IT!

Instead of questions like that, may we hear the voice of our Lord, saying, *"Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your Master."*

LET US PRAY.

Gracious God, all that we have is a gift from You. Show us the way, so that we use our money, our talents and the time we are given, in Your service and to Your glory.

And all God's children say:

Amen.

**Sola Deo Gloria!**