

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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The Rev. Dr. John H. Eastwood

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.

Matthew 25:29

“Live into the future with the gospel”

As we live out the Church Year, Sunday by Sunday, we notice that the lessons in these days just before the Advent season begins, become more filled with stern warnings about what is to come. Last Sunday, we heard the story of the ten bridesmaids, some who were wise in their preparation for things to come, some who were not. “Keep awake,” Jesus tells his disciples, “for you know neither the day nor the hour” of Christ’s coming. Filled with tension and excitement, as any wedding can produce, the disciples are put in the mind of being expectant about living their future with a sense of God’s coming. Or, today the whole matter is placed before us in the parable of the talents. We are admonished, if we follow that happens to the servants, to use our gifts wisely in the service of the Kingdom, for if we are not so wise, we may look forward to the outer darkness of regret and sorrow. The images that these parables employ are unforgettable, and of course they are meant to be so.

Another unforgettable image about this pre-Advent time in the life of the Church Year comes from Broadway in the musical *West Side Story*, a show that was popular in the late 50's and 60's. The award-winning musical is based in its story line on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and is set in Manhattan’s west side or “Hell’s Kitchen in the mid 1950's. It is a story that explores the rivalry between two teenage gangs of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. A young protagonist, Tony, belongs to the white gang, and falls in love with Maria, the sister of the

leader of the rival Puerto Rican gang. The dark themes of the social problems in dialogue, dance, and music reveal the search for hope in Tony who decides he wants a different future than gang life which has no future. He, too, is ready for things to come. In his case, he hopes his future brings a new life.

Epitomizing that search is the song “Something’s Coming” which he sings:

TONY

*Could be!
Who knows?
There's something due any day;
I will know right away,
Soon as it shows.
It may come cannon balling down through the sky,
Gleam in its eye,
Bright as a rose!*

*Who knows?
It's only just out of reach,
Down the block, on a beach,
Under a tree.
I got a feeling there's a miracle due,
Gonna come true,
Coming to me!*

*Could it be? Yes, it could.
Something's coming, something good,
If I can wait!
Something's coming, I don't know what it is,
But it is
Gonna be great!*

Far and away from the dark life of “Hell’s Kitchen,” and standing apart from the violent, no-future life of the gangs, there is a new future, Tony glimpses, for himself and his Maria. It remains to be seen how that works out for our protagonist, but the image for us in our lives and in the Church is a powerful one and important to our lesson today of the parable of the talents.

How many times in our lives, when the future looked dismal, did we cry out for something “new” to come our way. Even in today’s economic crisis do we not ask, “How long will this be?”

But let’s return to today’s gospel. The conventional use of this lesson, of course, is a stewardship one. It teaches us that no matter how many talents we have, or the nature of our gifts of time, abilities, or wealth - whatever they may be - God wants us to use them wisely and not waste them. There is nothing wrong with that interpretation, of course. Using our talents to glorify God is what we teach in our stewardship programs. However, is that all there is? There was much more to it for the disciples, and so, too, with the early Christian community. They looked for Christ’s second coming at any time, perhaps in their own life time. The question was, not just when, but what was it going to be like? Matthew gives us a clue in these parables. A new order, one of different values was to be expected, as our young Tony in West Side Story had hoped. In line with the teachings of the Master, a kingdom based on the values of mercy, peace, and forgiveness, was in store. And that was a reversal of the present order of darkness. And so . . .

Our parable is not really a gentle tale about what we, as Christians, should do with our gifts, but is more a disturbing story about what we do or not do with the *gospel* as they wait for the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

While the first two servants are wise and upon hearing or receiving Jesus’s words or “good news treasure” they act upon them, the third servant acts as the “foolish” one who built his house on sand. Jesus teaches that the coming kingdom is full of grace, but our foolish servant

listens to none of that. His god is a petty tyrant who is not just tough but evil. And all he can see is darkness; and his treasure, the “good news” of Jesus, is of no use to him. For him, there is no future except one where he must live with the consequences of his own faith, that is, to live in outer darkness.

How many times have we made the choice to live by false values which lead us on course to a dead end? How often have we looked back on the harshness, indifference, and the anger toward others in our past, and said, “If I had only known then what I know now, I would never have done it.” One important teaching of this parable for us is that we can know now what we will know in the future. And that is because the “Gospel” and its grace is our future, and at the end, nothing else is but the gospel. We are called to live out today the truth of God’s future. And God’s future is grace upon grace, it is the kingdom of mercy, peace, and forgiveness.

For those who run and hide under the bed from a bad, mean, and scolding God, they condemn themselves to a life spent under the bed alone, quivering in needless fear. If there is a future here, it is not God’s, and to live on those terms is to live an impoverished future.

Every time we decide to lift the darkness of others by our own charity in donating food or clothing for those in need, then that is to live knowing that there is a future, God’s future where all will be clothed in beautiful raiment and sit at God’s banquet of rich, fine foods and wine. Every time we speak words of acceptance and forgiveness, we live in the future tense of God. Wherever we, as Christians, in the words of that wonderful prayer, speak love where there is hate, hope where there is despair, consoling words rather than being consoled, then we remind

those to whom we speak that they too have a future in God's reign of love.

That is why the image from West Side Story is so unforgettable. "Something's coming, and it is going to be great." For those who live in the confidence that God is trustworthy and generous, "something is coming, and it indeed is great." AMEN