

# Sermon: Advent II

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Year B  
Judges 4:1-7  
Psalm 123  
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11  
Matthew 25:14-30

Have you ever seen any of these movies... Forrest Gump... Saving Private Ryan... Slumdog Millionaire... Memento... Annie Hall... Amadeus... or Gandhi... all of these movies begin... with their ending... and then walk us through how the storyline... and the characters... got to that place... and we have the benefit... of knowing how it all ends... and can more easily identify with the character's humanity... their insights... their challenges... the things they get right... or wrong... because these are the things we face in our lives too...

And part of why we celebrate a Seven Week Advent... is to hear the end of the story... again... the story about end-times... before we hear its Christmas-morning beginnings... again... so we have more time to consider how we fit into its sweeping panorama... consider how our lives are like those of the main characters... how our decisions are like theirs... or not... and so we also have a chance to see how... what *we bring* to the story... affects our understanding of it...

Our reading today... from Judges... is a story about judgment and redemption... Deborah... a prophetess... the wife of Lappidoth... was judging Israel... she's listed as the fourth judge of Israel... was a charismatic rather than dynastic leader... that means she didn't inherit her position... but lived into it... a judge was certainly a person who made decisions in legal disputes... but would also call the people to military action and would frequently lead them into battle... as Deborah was to do at Megiddo... which is where the final... decisive battle... at the end of history... called Armageddon... is said to take place.

In Psalm 123... we pray for relief... because we've had more than enough contempt... more than enough scorn from the indolent rich... and disdain from the proud... I imagine there are some here who can relate...

And today's Epistle reminded the Thessalonians... and reminds us... about the timing of the end times... of the Day of the Lord... that it will come without warning... Paul reminds them that they're already ready... and that God has destined them not for wrath... but for salvation through Jesus... and we're also reminded that judgment may be inescapable... but there is hope... not in ourselves... but in Christ Jesus...

And then we come to today's Gospel... a man was going on a journey... and he called three of his slaves... he gave five talents to one... two to another... and one to the third... a talent was a measure of money... and one talent was equal to fifteen years of income... so the first slave received seventy-years worth of income... a lifetime of wages... the second... thirty years... and the third... fifteen... for the first slave... at a modest income today of \$30,000.00... 5 talents would be \$2M 250K dollars...

I saw something on FB yesterday about the Keystone Pipeline... which would help transport oil from Canada's tar sands fields... it said that if it's built... it's expected to make the Koch brothers \$100 billion in profits... making them the wealthiest family in human history... that's a lot of talents... but I know there's a lot of self-serving drivel that's posted on FB... so I tried to vet that claim and confirm those numbers... I could not... but The Washington Post did report this past March... that when it comes to lease holders for Canadian tar sands... Koch Industries is the largest American... and foreign holder of tar sands leases in the region... coming in at 1.1 million acres... on the surface... if the numbers I couldn't verify are true... and if what we're talking about is simply return on investment... the man who went on a journey would be quite proud of them... that would be 44,444 lifetimes worth of income...

But in the parable itself... the first two slaves traded their money... and doubled it... scripture says nothing about how they did that... I don't think that detail is important... but the third took no chance of losing it... he buried it in the ground... and when the reckoning came... he said to the man who went on a journey: *I knew that you were a harsh man... reaping where you did not sow... and gathering where you did not scatter seed... so I was afraid... and I went and hid your talent in the ground... here... you have what is yours...*

In parables like this... the man who acts and then leaves... usually represents God... and if so... the third slave has got it wrong... I wonder if there may be some kind of projection going on... maybe the third slave reaps where *he* did not sow... and gathers where *he* did not scatter seed... and so he expects the same of the one who gave him fifteen years of wages...

Fr. Robert Farrar Capon writes: the theme of this parable is about *the ebullience of the Lord's joy... at throwing his money around... it is the theme of the divine party again... the party that lurks beneath the surface of history... and calls only for a recognition by faith... it is the fatted calf served up for a prodigal who did nothing but come home in faith... it's the free champagne and caviar for wedding guests who did nothing but trust the King's insistence on providing fancy costumes and party hats... it's the full pay for next-to-no-work-at-all given to grape pickers who just said yes to a last-minute promise... the only reason that judgment comes into it at all... is the sad fact that there will always be dummies... who refuse to trust a good thing when it's handed to them on a platter...* and I would add... the good thing that's handed to us on a platter... is our salvation...

Where this parable is true... I think... is that we have been given the gift of life... given to us at no cost... if we think about the investment as being only money... we'll miss the point... but it's not about the biggest return on the dollar... it's about how we invest

ourselves... and how we grow... and what we gain in that growth... that we can return to God...

But what I think is wrong... is that God doesn't throw us into outer darkness... God wants us at the party... I think we throw ourselves out... before we learn to trust a good thing when it's given as gift... before we come home in faith... I believe... that when a gift is given... there's nothing expected in return... ever... we just need to accept it... I think we throw ourselves into outer darkness when we mistakenly feel unworthy... when like the third slave... we create reasons to avoid accepting the gift... using it... living with it... When we reject the gift... it's like saving the sterling silver and china for a special day that's really every day... but which we *think* never comes... when we project our brokenness onto someone else... or blame others for our fears... if you've ever given a gift... and the recipient refuses it... you know some of what I mean... I think we throw ourselves into darkness when we realize that there was so much more that we could have done... in this situation or that... something we could have forgiven... something kind we could have said... a way that we could have helped... but just chose not to... The end of the story is that all are invited to the banquet... to this Table... and into these pews... And you will be invited... later this week... to consider how to use your gifts of energy... expertise... and money... as we continue to link together this community of believers... and extend an invitation to others to join us in touching the Kingdom of God...

On the surface level of the parable... we will never be the wealthiest people in human history... but in the places that matter... in the new heart... and the new spirit that God will give us... we'll be wealthier in God's history... than anyone can imagine...

Mike+