

*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father,
his ✝ Son Jesus Christ our Lord, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

IF YOU WATCH LATE NIGHT TV on any channel, you can't miss the commercial with Ronald Regan, Jr., telling the world he isn't afraid to burn in hell. He, of course, is advertising that he is an atheist. A non-believer. Unlike those of us who gather each week at a faith event.

Zephaniah has a word for him:

⁷Be silent before the Lord GOD!
For the day of the LORD is at hand;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
he has consecrated his guests.

Yes, the Lord is coming, but are you sure about what you ask for? God exists despite your denial. The prophecy has been consistent. You may not get to "hell" to burn.



¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the people
who rest complacently on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,
“The Lord will not do good,
nor will he do harm.”

What are you doing with the gift God gives to you?

That is the Gospel question.

Pastor Bob



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ST. PAUL'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF CURTIS BAY

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St. Paul's Mailing Address:

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ST. JOHN, BROOKLYN, AND ST. PAUL, CURTIS BAY,
 are congregations in the Delaware-Maryland Synod (www.demdsynod.org)
 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (www.elca.org).

St. John's weekly Sunday service begins with announcements at 8:50 a.m.; the service of holy communion starts at 9:00 a.m. **St. Paul's** service of holy communion is held at 11:00 a.m.

NEW SUPPLIER FOR POINSETTIAS—ORDER PLANTS BY DECEMBER 3

AFTER OUR MORE than 40-year relationship with Auchey's Nursery in Hanover, Pennsylvania, we learned that the owners have retired from their business. This came as quite a surprise. However, after talking with other area churches and different suppliers, we have found a new nursery for poinsettias, Maryland Flowers and Foliage in White Marsh.



We are happy to say the cost of each 7-inch pot with 10-12 blooms will remain at \$12 each. We can order the traditional red, white, and pink poinsettias. Envelopes for ordering your poinsettias will be available at the back of the church on the Welcome Table. You can place your completed envelopes in the offering plate, or you may order by calling or emailing the church office.

Large orders can be placed in the envelope on an additional paper. **The due date for poinsettia orders is Sunday, December 3, 2023.** Poinsettias will be available for pickup after the Christmas Day service.

Bounty of thanks

We thank thee, Lord, for the glory of the late days and the excellent face of thy sun. We thank thee for good news received. We thank thee for the pleasures we have enjoyed and for those we have been able to confer.

And now, when the clouds gather and the rain impends over the forest and our house, permit us not to be cast down; let us not lose the savor of past mercies and past pleasures; but, like the voice of a bird singing in the rain, let grateful memory survive in the hour of darkness. If there be in front of us any painful duty, strengthen us with the grace of courage; if any act of mercy, teach us tenderness and patience.



—Robert Louis Stevenson

Word Search Puzzle

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30)

T G A B T H I N G S E
M O N E Y J I D C G A
O O O C M O J S H A H
R D T A A U T S A I A
E W H U N R F L R N N
N E E S Y N A A G E D
T N R E C E I V E D E
E T A W A Y T E S O D
R C L G A T H E R N S
M A S T E R F I V E A
T M O G R O U N D O I
R E A P T A L E N T D

ALSO ANOTHER AWAY
BECAUSE CAME CHARGE
DONE ENTER FAITHFUL
FIVE GAINED GATHER
GOOD GROUND HANDED
JOURNEY MANY MASTER
MONEY MORE REAP
RECEIVED SAID SLAVE
TALENT THINGS WENT

“Give thanks for unknown blessings already on their way.”

—Native American saying

* * *

“On Thanksgiving Day we acknowledge our dependence.”

—William Jennings Bryan

* * *

“People will accept your ideas much more readily if you tell them Benjamin Franklin said it first.”

—David H. Comins

* * *

“A rose is not its thorns, a peach is not its fuzz, and a human being is not his or her crankiness.”

—Lisa Kogan

25TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

NOVEMBER 19, 2023

OVERVIEW

Awake to the Grace of God

Linked with the reading from 1 Thessalonians and Psalm 90, Jesus' parable of the talents invites a full-hearted response to God's lavish gifts of faith and purpose: "Use 'em if you've got 'em!" The people of God are meant to be engaged, alert, and ready to share what we have received from our prodigally (wastefully) generous God. While the parable has sometimes been interpreted in the context of judgment, a careful reading also spotlights the beauty of the faith-generated response to God's lavish grace.

One word for this is *stewardship*. Presented in light of God's gift of faith and purpose, this "churchy" term can today be transformed to new understanding in the proclamation of the gospel text. Instead of the weight of obligation and duty we so often associate with religion, we are invited today to another way: What does it mean to be awake to the grace of God?

On the surface Jesus' parable is a simple premise: the contrast of workers who please and workers who disappoint their master. Psalm 90 sings to us to carefully treasure our lifetimes, for there is something at stake. First Thessalonians is a letter reminding people they have exactly what they need to survive and thrive.

What does it mean to be awake to the grace of God?

In a time in history when so many people are discouraged with work, home, life, and church, a word from Jesus' parables may be healing, enriching, and startlingly attractive. The gospel text today is an opportunity to remind the people of God that there is a depth to faith that is sustainable. In fact, beneath the parables of Jesus is a depth it will take a lifetime to unpack.

CONNECTIONS WITH CREATION

The lectionary texts in November carry a sense of impending mortality as the Holy Land and the temperate region of the northern hemisphere move from autumn toward winter. How does our spiritual life interact with this seasonal change? The texts today showcase at least three spiritual dispositions related to this season of growing darkness and cold. The gospel text from Matthew ponders the fear and urgency that may be prompted by the end of one of life's seasons. The Thessalonians text counsels a sort of spiritual sobriety and readiness in the dark of the night-like seasons. And Psalm 90 places the seasons we experience in a theo-cosmic perspective: "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night. . . . So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom" (vv. 4, 12, *ELW*).



LECTIONARY NOTES BY GAIL RAMSHAW

LECTIONARY 33, YEAR A

Some people do a good job of using their talents to benefit others, but some people never employ their talents to the full. Come to worship this coming Sunday. Hear the parable about talents; receive God's blessing; and at the table be strengthened to become an ever more creative and faithful servant in God's kingdom.

THE READINGS IN THE BIBLE

Matthew 25:14-30

In this second-to-the-last parable in Matthew, despite his anticipation of the coming of the parousia, the evangelist still urges perhaps especially church leaders to realize the importance of their tasks and to meet these responsibilities with care and creativity. A talent was equal to fifteen years of a laborer's wages; thus five talents would exceed the wages of a lifetime. The hope that God will bless those who do their tasks well echoes one strand of Jewish spirituality, seen for example throughout Proverbs.

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Speaking before the reforms of King Josiah in the seventh century BCE, the prophet Zephaniah condemned especially Israelite idolatry and the society's oppression of the poor. God has commanded obedience to the covenant, and God will punish offenders. Today's excerpt from chapter 1 includes a fierce criticism of those who trust in their financial status and a severe description of God's coming judgments. Yet in Zephaniah's conclusion in chapter 3, God promises salvation and a restoration of all that is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In this last excerpt from 1 Thessalonians, Paul reiterates the Jewish prophetic tradition by anticipating a sudden arrival of the final divine judgment. Yet, like Zephaniah 3, Paul also places his faith in a God who has destined us not for wrath but for salvation. Ephesians 6 amplifies the imagery of armor in verse 8: with this metaphor Paul reminds "the children of light" of the extreme difficulty of living the Christian life.

THE READINGS ON THIS DAY

Sunday, November 13–19

Lectionary 33

On the second-to-the-last Sunday of the church year the readings continue to proclaim God's call to righteous living. From the word and sacraments we receive the salvation that God wills for us.

Matthew 25:14-30

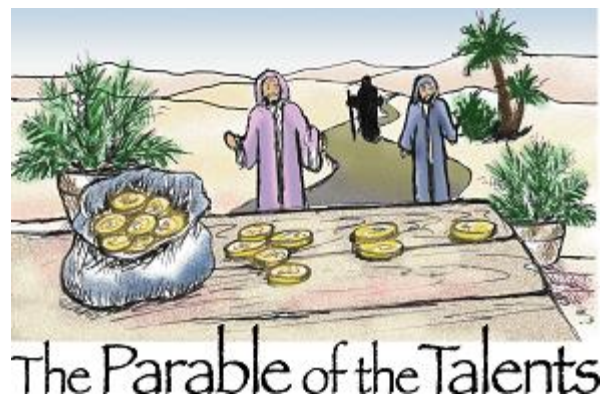
The English word "talent" meaning a person's natural ability arose in the fifteenth century as preachers allegorized this parable, applying the Roman coins to individual capabilities. A common use of this parable is to stress what Lutherans call "law": we are obligated to use our talents to the best of our ability, or the punishment of hell awaits us. The parable also proclaims what Lutherans call "gospel": all good comes from God, who provides us far more than we need, God's grace given in abundance for our use.

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Because Matthew's gospel uses money as a symbol for one's life, the passage from Zephaniah was chosen for its condemnation of misuse of money. Trusting in wealth, which is a particularly American temptation, is shown to be the dead end that it is.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

On this Sunday, it is especially in this second reading that God's good news is proclaimed. It is God's will to save and to keep us in light, so that we may live with Christ. The Christian community shares with one another this encouraging word. Early Christians spoke of baptism as the light within and by which we live; thus we need not fear a life walking "like the blind" (Zeph.1:17).



IMAGES IN THE READINGS

It is interesting that our English word **talent** meaning ability comes from interpretations of this parable. Christians believe that God's creation is ongoing, that every human capability is a gift from the Creator, and that we are called to use all of God's creation wisely.

Zephaniah's litany describing a **day of wrath** continues in our time especially in popular disaster movies. Humans continue to be fearful of an unknown future. When Christians gather on Sunday before an image of the crucified Christ, we acknowledge our fears, and protecting ourselves with the breastplate and helmet of the faith, we join together hoping for God's mercy.



Paul likens the coming of the end to **labor pains**. With the pregnant woman, we hope that the pains will lead to life. The infant will come into the light.

VISUAL ART

In a 1712 woodcut depicting this Sunday's parable, note the unworthy servant busy burying his talent in the ground.

COMMENTS FROM THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

The soul is like a housewife who has put all her household in good order and prudently arranged it and well disposed it; she has taken good care that nothing will damage it, her provision for the future is wise, she knows exactly what she is going, she acquires and discards, she does what is proper, she avoids mistakes, and always she knows how everything should be. So it is with the soul: the soul is all love, and love rules in the soul, mighty and powerful, working and resting, doing and not doing, and all which is in the soul and comes to the soul is according to Love's will. For it is Love's power that has

seized the soul and led it, sheltered and protected it, given it prudence and wisdom and the sweetness and the strength which belong to love. Like the fish, swimming in the vast sea and resting in its deeps, and like the bird, boldly mounting high in the sky, so the soul feels its spirit freely moving through the vastness and the depth and the unutterable richness of Love.



—Beatrice of Nazareth

[Beatrice of Nazareth, trans. Eric Colledge, in *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 204.]

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Grateful for grace

In this oneness, Jesus Christ is the Mediator, the Reconciler, between God and man. Thus he comes forward to man on behalf of God, calling for and awakening faith, love and hope, and to God on behalf of man, representing man, making satisfaction and interceding. Thus he attests and guarantees to God's free grace and at the same time attests and guarantees to God man's free gratitude.

—Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*



Decorate the Mitten Tree... and not just with mittens—but with hats, scarves, gloves, caps, and socks for both children and adults, too. Your donations will be given to the little children in the Head Start program at St. John and to the adults who attend the community meal on Thursday. The tree will be in place at the back of the church on December 3. Thanks for helping the children and our neighbors keep warm during the cold winter months.

Shopping List

- Canned peas, sweet potatoes, corn, green beans, baked beans, and lima beans, etc.
- Chicken or turkey gravy (can or jar)
- Instant potatoes and rice
- Evaporated milk and shelf-stable milk
- Box brown sugar
- Box stuffing mix
- Cereal
- Canned tuna and meat (Spam)
- Peanut butter and jelly
- Crackers
- Dried pasta and spaghetti sauce
- Canned soup and stews
- Canned pasta meals
- Canned apple sauce and other fruit
- Macaroni and cheese dinners
- Napkins
- Dish detergent
- Bath soap and other toiletries (seal in plastic bag)
- Any other non-perishables you want to include

Thank you!

Christmas Food Collection Starts Soon

If you are able, please support the annual food basket drive to help those in need. To the left is a helpful shopping list.

Over the next few weeks, please pick up a non-perishable item (or two or three) each time you shop, until it's time for delivering the food on December 17. Collection boxes will soon be available at the back of the church.

As usual, **monetary contributions** are needed to buy hams, turkeys, pies, fresh fruit and vegetables, and other perishable foods, to make the baskets complete. Offering envelopes for your monetary gift will be available at the back of the church. In these difficult economic times, when food costs are rising, your donations are crucial.

Some of the people we assist are elderly and/or physically disabled or mentally challenged, and live alone. Regular-size cans and packages of food are best, rather than super-sizes. Questions, call the church office, 410.355.7295.

Please celebrate the birth of our Lord by helping those who need it most.



Food Donations

SUPPORT THE 2024 SEAFARERS' CHRISTMAS AT SEA PROJECT

By Fran Sieradzki

ONCE AGAIN ST. JOHN will be sponsoring the Seafarer' Christmas at Sea project which lifts the spirits of lonely seafarers who are far away from their homes and family during the Christmas season. The project helps spread the good news of the Bible and provides warm outerwear to the seafarers who are often from warm climates and need warm clothing during their winter journey.



There is a donation box in the back of the church to collect needed items. If you knit, we need winter adult size caps and scarves. Of course, we will gladly accept donations to help buy the supplies. You may simply place a donation in an envelope marked: Christmas at Sea Gift Bags and place the envelope in the offering plate.

Here is a list of needed items for each bag:



- One sweatshirts – hooded or unhooded (L or XL)
- Three pairs of socks – thermal or white gym
- One casual pullover T-shirt (M or L)
- One knit winter hat
- One knit scarf
- One pair of gloves
- A Christmas card from *you*

Items and donations will be accepted through **December 17**. Then bundles will be filled and given to Pastor Bob to take to Baltimore International Seafarers' Center at the Baltimore port. Speak with me for more details. Please help provide spiritual and physical comfort during the cold season to visiting seafarers. Thank you.

Our Pastor's
RETIREMENT

**SAVE
THE DATE!**

PASTOR K. ROBERT SCHMITT'S RETIREMENT

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2023

ST. JOHN'S DAY

Worship service at 4:00 p.m.

Fellowship dinner immediately following the service.

Details will be made available as the event draws closer.

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Clement, Bishop of Rome, died around 100
Thursday, November 23, 2023

Clement was the third bishop of Rome. He is best remembered for a letter he wrote to the congregation in Corinth, still struggling with the same problems that led to Paul's letters to them. As did Paul, he focused on the need for love among Christians.



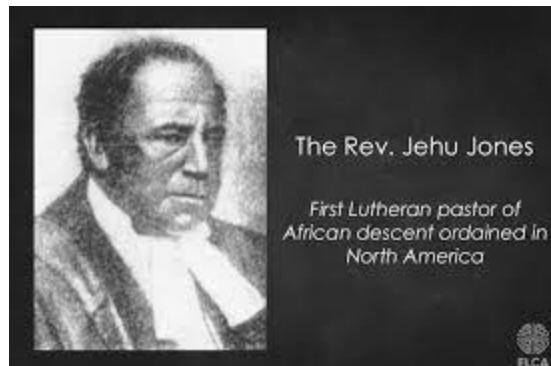
Miguel Agustín Pro, martyr, died 1927
Thursday, November 23, 2023

Pro grew up in a time when the Mexican revolutionaries accused the church of siding with the wealthy. He became a Jesuit priest, and worked on behalf of the poor and homeless. Falsely accused of throwing a bomb at a government official, he was executed, but not before crying out "Long live Christ the King!"

Justus Falckner, died 1723; Jehu Jones, died 1852;
William Passavant, died 1894; pastors in North
America

Friday, November 24, 2023

Not only was Falckner the first Lutheran ordained in North America, but he published a catechism which was the first Lutheran book published on the continent. Jones was the Lutheran church's first African American pastor and carried out missionary work in Philadelphia which led to the formation there of the first African American Lutheran congregation (St. Paul's). William Passavant helped to establish hospitals and orphanages in a number of cities and was the first to introduce deaconesses to the work of hospitals in the United States.



Isaac Watts, hymnwriter, died 1748
Saturday, November 25, 2023

Thought by many to be the greatest hymnwriter in the English language, Watts as a youth was critical of the quality of the metrical psalter of the time. He wrote about 600 hymns—many based on the psalms, but others that are not.

