



## Sermon for the Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, November 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[I. Thessalonians 5:1-11](#)      [Matthew 25:14-30](#)

Good morning!

You are children of Light, children of the Day.

Even in this world of continuing changes and uncertainty that tries to seduce us down dark alleys of unhealthy alliances. Even in this world where real threats and challenges seem to abound and multiply.

We hold our state and region, and our nation and world, in prayer as we continue to move through this coronavirus pandemic that is continuing to claim lives and put a deep cost on all of us as we try to reduce and slow its spread. Governor Little has returned Idaho back to stage 2, limiting gatherings to 10 or fewer.

During these next months, as you practice care and safety in your necessary interactions with others, please stay in prayer. Especially, keep our doctors, nurses, and all who are working in healthcare in prayer. And pray for all who work for public safety, for our schools, and for all essential workers who continue to face risks.

Sometimes in this world, it can feel like the “End Times” – like things are just wrapping themselves toward some kind of climax, and we remember the promise of the return of Jesus Christ to set in motion a new heaven and new earth. And that tends to be a theme in our scriptures each year around this time. We are nearing the end of the church's year. Next Sunday marks the end of our year, with a celebration of Christ the King – Christ the Prince of Peace and Lord of Life.

Today's scriptures help us lean with hope and anticipation toward the coming of the Lord, the return of Christ.

I thought we could simply walk through two of today's scripture texts, to mark some important themes for us. These themes are important for us anytime, and are especially important for us in these days.

From the New Testament letter, I Thessalonians, we hear the writer remind the early followers of Jesus in Thessalonika, “You are all children of Light and children of the Day... We belong to the Day.” In the midst of the darkness and insecurity and confusion of this world, God holds us

in the light. The Holy Spirit turns our hearts and minds to the Light that has shined in the darkness and has not been and never will be overcome.

The writer of this encouraging letter also reminds these early Christians how important it is to hold and share faith, love, and hope. Faith is that strong trust and dedicated belief in God's goodness. Hope is a combination of deep desire for, deep trust, and lively expectation for the fulfillment of God's promises. And the greatest of these, love, is what draws us to God and each other and our neighbors – and even our enemies. Love, as Bishop Curry has said, is not mere sentiment. Love is a choice and a commitment to a way of choosing, to open our hearts to see God, others, ourselves, and all creation with eyes of adoration and care.

These are the gifts we have to encourage and build up each other. The writer says we are to build up one another – by reminding each other that we are called to be children of the Light, by sharing stories with each other that help us remember God's goodness and love, by loving each other and extending love to the world around us as our way of following Jesus' Way of Love, and by holding up the beacon of hope for each other and the world around us in words of God's promises.

And we are not to keep God's gifts to ourselves. We aren't supposed to circle up and keep God's gifts only among those who belong to the club of our little, safe Christian community. God's gifts to us are to be taken into the world around us.

So, then, from the Gospel of Matthew, we have the parable of the talents. It may not seem entirely fair, as some people seem to maybe have more gifts and talents than others. But that seems to be just part of life. Some people encounter more challenges in life than others. Some receive equal rewards for less effort. Some people get to return home after squandering their gifts, while others choose to stay steadily on a course chosen for them. Some people just have a better knack at doing or learning certain things, while others struggle to do the same.

But maybe that's okay. Jesus doesn't offer a picture of a perfectly equitable world in his teachings and parables. Jesus seems to take what is the reality of the world, and then help us see the deeper and more abiding truths of God's ways.

It isn't how many gifts, talents, or blessings you can count that you have. It's more about how you approach what you've been given, and how you choose to see the situation of your life and the world around you. Two slaves move forward to put the gifts they have been given to use. They enter the public square. They move into the world of commerce and trade and work around them. They don't stay separate. And they bring their gifts into that world as good things to offer. One slave sees things differently from the start. And that slave chooses to withdraw, to hide, and to bury the one gift entrusted. Crippled by private (and maybe shared) anxieties and biases, this slave pulled back. Think of all the lost time and lost possibility – all the people and situations this slave did not encounter, all the ways that the gift was not seen or used.

At the heart of this parable, Jesus orients us toward a habit of public exchange of the gifts of the kingdom, unhindered by personal or collective anxiety, shame, or bias. Kingdom life depends on us sharing in the wide public sphere what God has given us to share.

Now, it is time for us to be thinking toward the future for St. Luke's. Next year is upon us, and we can't wait to turn the page and move past 2020 into 2021! We are called to move forward in faith, hope, and love, dedicating our talents and gifts to encouraging and building up each other and to bringing the good gifts of God's liberating and life-giving love into the world around us. We do this with our actions, our words, our time, our efforts, and our money and resources.

It's the season for us to consider what we will give to support the ministry and mission of St. Luke's in this coming year of 2021. We continue to be a vibrant church, and we look forward with hope to a new year that will bring healing in many ways across our region, nation, and world. I am on Diocesan Council, and we spent yesterday going over and approving the budget for the whole diocese. It is a budget full of faith and hope, and trust that we all will continue our faithful work in communities across this region. We are children of Light, children of the Day. And we have been given so much that we can share and are called to share. How will you – and how will we together – share our gifts with each other and with the world around us? How will you – and how will we together – build up each other and our surrounding communities with God's gifts of faith, hope, and love?

The talents are in your hands. What will you do next?