



Community CRC

Oakdale

**ADVENT: WAITING WELL**

**WHILE I'M WAITING – PART 1**

**MATTHEW 25:1-30**

**12-13-20**

**All = bold sections – read together**

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

*Sung together = italics*

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

### **Reflect**

Those who put themselves in His hands will become perfect, as He is perfect- perfect in love, wisdom, joy, beauty, health, and immortality. The change will not be completed in this life, for death is an important part of the treatment. How far the change will have gone before death in any particular Christian is uncertain. C.S. Lewis

### **Welcome**

Good Morning! Welcome to Community CRC time of worship. What is worship? Biblically, it is a wholistic giving of oneself to another in joyful delight for who they are, what they have done and what they will do. For Christians, it is a practice of doing that arises from an identity of being that is orientated and grounded in Christ. Humans were created to worship and we were created to worship the only One who is worthy of that worship – the Living Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May we make the most of our time this morning not as passive consumers of religious goods but as active participants that worship the King of Kings, our living hope.

**May the love and joy of the Father, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ours in abundance this morning.**

### **Call to Worship – Psalm 33**

We are in the third week of Advent – the season of waiting. This third week we will give our attention to waiting in and with joy. Joy – a biblically rich word that goes far beyond mere happiness. Joy is a state of being that arises from our vital union with Jesus. It is NOT dependent of external circumstances but independent of them. That is, no matter what is going on around you and in you, there is always a connection to joy in Christ who is in us at all times through the Holy Spirit. Because joy is not merely external and superficial giddiness or pleasure or happiness, it can exist with and beneath sorrow and grief as the deeper and more fundamental state of being. While external circumstances may be dark, there is light in Christ. That is, whatever we find ourselves in, it is always found within a larger narrative and drama in which love and grace and forgiveness and joy have the final and lasting word because of the finished work of Jesus that is applied to us and for us by the Holy Spirit. Notice the joy and praise in Psalm 33 and why they are fitting for a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.

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Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.



**For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses.**

Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

**The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.**

The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

**Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.**

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Even in waiting, there can be gladness and joy!

**Song** – Living Hope -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f2FXxDVO6w>

*How great the chasm that lay between us  
How high the mountain I could not climb  
In desperation, I turned to heaven  
And spoke Your name into the night  
Then through the darkness, Your loving-kindness  
Tore through the shadows of my soul  
The work is finished, the end is written  
Jesus Christ, my living hope  
  
Who could imagine so great a mercy?  
What heart could fathom such boundless grace?  
The God of ages stepped down from glory  
To wear my sin and bear my shame  
The cross has spoken, I am forgiven  
The King of kings calls me His own  
Beautiful Savior, I'm Yours forever  
Jesus Christ, my living hope  
  
Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free  
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me  
You have broken every chain  
There's salvation in Your name*



*Jesus Christ, my living hope  
Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free  
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me  
You have broken every chain  
There's salvation in Your name  
Jesus Christ, my living hope  
Then came the morning that sealed the promise  
Your buried body began to breathe  
Out of the silence, the Roaring Lion  
Declared the grave has no claim on me  
Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free  
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me  
You have broken every chain  
There's salvation in Your name  
Jesus Christ, my living hope  
Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free  
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me  
You have broken every chain  
There's salvation in Your name  
Jesus Christ, my living hope  
Jesus Christ, my living hope*

**Advent Candle** – Joy (Myanmar)

In the Old Testament, the word “joy” is nearly always associated with an act of God, and even more specifically, with an act of God delivering his people. The people of Israel found themselves in need of God’s deliverance on more than one occasion. When they were enslaved in Egypt, God set them free.

**As they traveled to the promised land, God proved to the Israelites over and over again that he was far stronger and more powerful than the enemy nations who opposed them. When the nation of Israel was carried off into captivity by the Babylonians, again they cried out to God to rescue them, and God delivered them and brought them back to Jerusalem.**

Each time they were rescued, the Israelites were joyful and rejoiced in God’s love for them. But each time they soon forgot God’s deliverance and turned away from God. In a cold and dirty stable in the small, unimportant town of Bethlehem, God again delivered his people.

**This time, however, it was not just for a time, not just until the next warring nation came across the river. This time it was forever, for eternity. God sent his Son to deliver his people not just from enemies who threatened them, but from their sin that separated them from himself.**

We can imagine the joy on the faces of the shepherds as they made their way to the stable. We can almost see the joy on the faces of the wise men who traveled great distances to find this new king. And we can feel the radiant joy of Simeon and Anna in the temple as they came face to face with the Savior of the world.



**God sent himself to us to bring us life and never-ending joy. Today, as we celebrate Advent and think of joy, let's not forget. Let's remember and live each day in the knowledge and understanding of what God has done for us. We are delivered! How can we not be joyful?**

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Jesus of Nazareth said that to be a Christian means to be maltreated for his name's sake (Matthew 5:11) and the apostle Paul said that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Mistreatment as a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of *if* but a matter of *when* and a matter of *degree*. Hope is a vital aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. This is especially true under heavy persecution. In America, the land of religious freedom, we have it pretty easy in that there is minimal outright persecution against Christians. **May we make the most of our religious freedom to honor Christ and give credible and coherent witness to him! At the same time, may we be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who don't share the same freedom that we do. The 19th place that is most challenging to be a disciple of Jesus is Myanmar.**

Of the 54.5 million people who call Myanmar home, 4.3 million are Christians. Pressure on Christians has slowly increased and converts face strong pressure from their family and community. Rebel groups are active in Wa State, and many churches have been forcibly closed. Buddhist extremists maintain that to be Burmese – the majority ethnic group – is to be Buddhist, so there is intense pressure on all religious minorities, including Christians. The army also maintains tight control over the government in Myanmar, restricting and minimizing the rights of Christians.

Prayer Points: Pray for persecuted Christian minorities, that they would lovingly minister to persecuted Rohingya Muslims, especially those choosing to return from exile in Bangladesh. Pray that many hearts would be opened to the truth of Christ Jesus. Pray for Christians who convert from Buddhism and Islam and live under intense pressure from their families and communities. Pray for them to feel connected to the Church of God around the world.

**Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!**

**Song** – Holy, Holy, Holy -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgHrNNM23p8>

*Holy, holy, holy!  
Lord God Almighty  
Early in the morning  
Our song shall rise to Thee  
Holy, holy, holy!  
Merciful and mighty  
God in three persons  
Blessed Trinity!  
Holy, holy, holy!  
Though the darkness hide thee  
Though the eye of sinful man  
Thy glory may not see  
Only Thou art holy  
There is none beside Thee  
Perfect in power, in love and purity*



*Holy, holy, holy!  
Lord God Almighty  
All thy works shall praise Thy name  
In earth and sky and sea  
Holy, holy, holy!  
Merciful and mighty  
God in three persons  
Blessed Trinity*

**Song** – Ancient Of Days -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJUtaW21qAM>

*Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall  
There is still one King reigning over all  
So I will not fear for this truth remains  
That my God is, the Ancient of Days  
None above Him, none before Him  
All of time in His hands  
For His throne it shall remain and ever stand  
All the power, all the glory  
I will trust in His name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
Though the dread of night overwhelms my soul  
He is here with me, I am not alone  
O His love is sure, and He knows my name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
None above Him, none before Him  
All of time in His hands  
For His throne it shall remain and ever stand  
All the power, all the glory  
I will trust in His name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
Though I may not see what the future brings  
I will watch and wait for the Savior King  
Then my joy complete, standing face to face  
In the presence of the Ancient of Days  
None above Him, none before Him  
All of time in His hands  
For His throne it shall remain and ever stand  
All the power, all the glory  
I will trust in His name  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days  
For my God is, the Ancient of Days*

**Centering Prayer** – Daniel’s Prayer (Daniel 9:4b-19)



O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

**To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you.**

To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him.

**He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth.**

Therefore, the LORD has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly.

**O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.**

Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name.

**For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.**

#### **Offering** – Oakdale Rescue Mission

Oakdale Rescue Mission (ORM) reaches out to transform lives and provide hope in Oakdale by reaching out to the homeless and others in need. Outreach includes meals, clothing, other humane support, resources and referrals. ORM's desire is to enhance the lives of the entire community of Oakdale. ORM is a faith-based Christian non-profit organization; their purpose and heart is to serve others, which includes our entire community.

**We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.**



(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

### **Youth Celebration**

A youthful spirit is esteemed in scripture. Not only are we told to have childlike faith in Jesus but that as we age and our bodies begin to “waste away,” we are being renewed inwardly day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). That is, while outwardly we become older, aged inwardly we become younger, new in Christ. As disciples of Jesus, our inward disposition is not supposed to match our outward appearance. Our youth remind all of us about this profound biblical truth. Take a moment to silently reflect on and engage with God regarding this powerful truth.

### **Scripture Reading** – Matthew 25:1-30

Jesus is teaching his disciples how they are to wait for him to come again, both in his non-bodily judgment of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in AD 70 and his second bodily coming yet to happen. Because he has not come a second time bodily, Jesus’ instructions are equally important for us today, 2,000 years later as we continue to wait well for him. We’ve already noted that in order to wait well, we need to not be in a hurry; that hurry is a great enemy of waiting well. Furthermore, we noted that we are not to be in a hurry for the wrong thing. We can set our hopes on earthly things and not on Jesus of Nazareth and heavenly things. When we slow down and get our focus on Jesus of Nazareth right, then what? What are we supposed to be doing while we wait? We will address this in two parts that will cover this and next week.

Remember, Jesus is just a couple of days from his death. He is determined to disentangle the disciples from false idols of religion – the Jews as the chosen people; Jerusalem as the holy city and the temple as the presence of God and the sign of his blessing on them. There is no one people (American, white, Protestant, Reformed) or one place (country, state, city) or one thing (church building, political party) that is the end all, be all. Instead, in Christ Jesus there are peoples from all nations and tribes and colors and Christian cultural flavors that are united in him as one people; distinct but one; individuals in community, interdependent – one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-5). As such, we are waiting together, for the same thing and with the same hope and with the same expectations. That Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead and set all things right once and forever by removing all evil and sin from this world; thus, purifying it and setting it to flourishing and developing without the barriers and hindrances that are currently present. With this in mind and the question, “What am I/we supposed to do while we wait?”, please read Matthew 25:1-30 now.

### **Gospel Message** – While I’m Waiting – Part 1

Imagine yourself on a favorite beach whether in Florida, Hawaii, California or another place. The weather is a perfect 80 degrees. Warm enough to want to venture into the water but cool enough that you don’t feel uncomfortably hot. The sand is warm under your feet and slightly tickles as you wiggle your toes in it and let it fall between them back onto the beach. The sound of waves draws your gaze outward to endless blue with an occasional fluffy white cloud above. There is a gently, caressing breeze that is warm on the skin and carries the pleasant smell of the ocean. The beach is mostly yours; quiet and peaceful and calming and perfect. You get up from your towel or beach chair after a sip of your favorite beverage and slowly walk to the water – slowly letting your feet and then your legs adjust to the water temperature. The waves crash around you but more in a playful than a menacing kind of



way. You continue to wade in until you no longer are touching bottom but floating, bobbing, swimming and relaxing in the calming water as you get past the breaking waves. You close your eyes for just a short while. When you open them, you're a bit startled and disorientated. The beach seems a lot farther away than it should be. Your heart rate begins to rise as you look around. It begins to dawn on you that you are caught in a rip current that is showing no signs of letting up. You try to swim back to shore but make no progress, only creating more exhaustion and fatigue and increasing anxiety and fear. Your once peaceful, relaxing and enjoyable time is now completely gone. You're in danger; danger of drowning. In the midst of this increasing danger, you remember to swim not back to shore but parallel to the beach to get out of the rip current. So you make your body go a direction that seems wrong. And within a short span of time and moderate effort, you are no longer being dragged out to sea but now are able to swim towards shore. Shaking and fatigued and out of breath, you finally feel the wonderful sand beneath your feet and you tiredly scramble onto the beach and catch your breath once again. And reflect on what went wrong. What happened?

You were caught unaware. You had become oblivious to the dangers of the ocean. The beauty and tranquility and your confidence in your swimming ability had lured you into a false sense of security. If you would have looked a little more carefully, you would have seen the clear and tell-tale signs of the rip current. If you presently had a little more respect for the power of the ocean you might of gone out with a floating device, especially if you were thinking of being out there for more than a few minutes. Each year, 100 people die in America from being caught in a rip current. Tens of thousands more are rescued. You made it – barely. Complacency is dangerous. Complacency is a state of self-confidence or self-satisfaction that is accompanied by unawareness of actual potential dangers, deficiencies or defects. In often leads to a state of inaction; a state of drifting that moves you closer or deeper into danger – much like being unaware that you are stepping into a dangerous rip current. A little wisdom to look first and a little action to move down the beach to a safer place would have prevented the dangerous situation that has the potential to kill. In our passage today, we find Jesus utilizing two parables that speaks to complacency; to being unaware of potential danger. In the first, we will see that five women are foolish because they are unprepared. In the second we see one servant who is wicked because he is lazy and slothful. Both exhibit signs of complacency; of not being prepared, aware or active in what they were supposed to be doing at the time. Both get caught in the rip current of complacency and are swept out to sea and their death while the others are not. Let's take a closer look at these two parables as we seek to answer the question of "What do I do while I'm waiting for Jesus to return?"

Jesus is describing what "the kingdom of heaven will be like" to the disciples as a way of showing them who are the ones that will inherit this kingdom when it fully comes in Christ Jesus when he comes again bodily. In other words, who are the ones that will be removed by the rip current of complacency from entering into the kingdom of heaven and who are the ones that will be "left behind" and able to enter into the kingdom of heaven. We will see in the first parable that wise preparation for waiting counters complacency. In the second parable, we will see that active service utilizing the resources that God gives us combined with the wisdom of the first parable counters the rip current of complacency.

Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven will be like ten young ladies who are going to a wedding celebration hosted by the groom. Immediately, Jesus makes it clear that he wants to make a contrast between some of them: five are foolish and five are wise. His emphasis in this parable is on the wise





women (the next parable will put the contrast emphasis on the foolish servant). The difference between the two is again given early in the parable by Jesus who states that the foolish are the ones who took no extra oil with them while the wise did bring extra oil with them. That's the initial difference given. However, that is not the final and more fundamental reason given by Jesus at the end (will get there shortly). This is how the parable plays out. They all take their lamps (it must be dark already) but five take extra oil along with them. Why? It doesn't say but they must have had some idea of the possibility of the bridegroom not arriving at the time they do and would need to wait for a while. So they, in preparing for the evening with the bridegroom decide to take extra oil just in case it would be longer. And indeed, it is longer. The other five must have thought to themselves that there was no need to take extra oil. They made a wrong assessment of the bridegroom and his possible arrival time. They are unaware that it is possible he might be delayed and arrive at a later time. Plus, carrying extra oil isn't easy. It would be heavy and cumbersome to carry both the lamp and the oil. It would be inconvenient and uncomfortable. In the end, they decide not to take extra oil (or it does not even enter their minds to do so).

The bridegroom is delayed, just as the wise anticipated might be a possibility. As they wait, they all grow tired and fall asleep. This is okay. This is not what distinguishes the foolish from the wise as they all sleep. In other words, this is not alluding to what we talked about last week of staying awake and being alert. It simply serves to highlight the delay. Then suddenly at midnight, amidst a deep sleep a loud cry of announcement jolts them awake – The bridegroom is coming! He is almost here! Come out and meet him! The ten young ladies all get up and trim the wicks of their lamps. It's at this moment the contrast is known and seen. The five with no extra oil now realize that they are almost out and will not have enough. They ask the wise five who were aware enough to take extra. However, the five wise young ladies have only enough extra oil for themselves. They refuse to give them any. The foolish five will need to go back and get their own. A secondary point that Jesus is making here is that we cannot depend on others for our preparedness. We are responsible for our own preparedness for the arrival of the King and will be held accountable for it. It is up to you to be wise and prepared for Jesus of Nazareth's second bodily coming. The primary point is – Are you ready? Are you prepared? How do you know? To that we turn now.

The foolish five leave and go back to get more oil while the wise five who are ready continue on and meet the bridegroom. He opens the door to his place and invites them, and all the others who are "ready" to enter into the marriage feast – and then shuts the door behind them – for good. The wise who were prepared and are ready, are now with the bridegroom and celebrating with him and the others there. Eating, drinking, dancing, laughing – joy and delight and abundance are all theirs with the bridegroom. They are enjoying being in "the kingdom of heaven" which is likened to this marriage feast for those who are ready. But the others, the foolish five and all that are not ready do not. And Jesus gives them (and us) a startling reason why – the more fundamental reason why the foolish five are foolish. They come to the door of the bridegroom's place where the feast and celebration is happening and pound on the door demanding that the "lord" (which means "master" and is impersonal) let them in! Open the door for us! Here we are – the life of the party! Let us in! The foolish five demand and command (the verb is an imperative) that the bridegroom let them in! Jesus' response is, "I do not know you." There it is! The foolish five think or pretend like they are friends with the bridegroom when they are not. This is likely why they are unaware that he might be delayed – they don't know him or



what he has said or done in the past. The wise five do. They know the bridegroom – what he has said and done in the past so they are aware that there is likely to be a delay and that they are to be ready and prepared for that. I do not know you. Those are the worst words you can possibly here from Jesus of Nazareth. They are meant to be hard. Sometimes the truth hurts. They are truthfully hard to jolt us out of any complacency we might have fallen into; to heighten a sense to evaluate our lives against the biblical truths and not against worldly presuppositions; to help us be prepared and ready for Jesus to return again.

The main point is that the kingdom of God, when it arrives in all its fullness in Christ and through Christ Jesus is for those who are known by Jesus and in turn, know him. It is for those to whom Jesus will say, “I know you! Welcome my friends! I’ve been expecting you! Come on in!” This knowing is an experiential “for” knowing. That is, love. Love is for the other to appropriately make much of them and delight in them and to enjoy being with them. Some only intellectually “know” Jesus of Nazareth. They might be able to pass a Bible test but they have no real relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. He remains distant and only a set of principles and doctrines and dogmas. He is not a Supreme Being to worship, to humbly listen to and serve and follow and submit to. He is not the One to whom they seek to conform their image and likeness to. He is not the One they are passionate about nor are willing to be with on a daily basis and faithfully remain loyal to. He is not the one to be honest and truthful to, willing to confess and repent of sin and disobedience. Some know Jesus of Nazareth intellectually and experientially but not in a “for” way. The Devil and demons “know” Jesus of Nazareth in both an intellectual and experiential way but they do not love him. They hate him; ignore him; belittle him, disobey him, betray him, deny him. In the end, those who are not known by Jesus nor know him in love are destined to be conformed more and more into the image and likeness of the Devil and demons. So, it’s not just knowing about Jesus nor knowing Jesus experientially but knowing him both in love and by love and through love and for love.

This is the Good News – that we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). We are saved by God’s grace towards us undeserving people and not because of any merit of our own. Our humble and loyal and lasting faith is a gift of that gracious love and our response to being saved by grace. Faith doesn’t initiate salvation but it enables it by becoming the conduit through which God’s transformative love and mercy and grace are experienced and realized and made tangible in our lives. As Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” *Grace through faith. Why?* So that we don’t boast in self. *Why?* Because the giver gets the glory and this “doing” is a “gift of God” so he gets the glory. However, there is more – the very important and highly significant verse 10 that says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Disciples of Jesus are God’s artwork in Christ Jesus. *Why?* So that we will do “good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” for Jesus. God has prepared good works for us to be doing while we are waiting that serve to glorify God and act as evidence of God’s saving and transformative presence in our daily lives. Those who are known by God in Jesus Christ, are saved by grace through faith so that they will engage with the good works that God has prepared for us to do. This is what the second parable is generally about.

The parable of the talents takes the wise five’s preparedness and tells us to get after it. After what? Well, we’ll explore that a whole lot more specifically next week when Jesus talks about doing it “for the



least of these.” Today, we’ll keep our attention on the text and see that the Apostle Paul, quoted above was spot on about how we are saved and to what we are saved to. Jesus says in this parable that there are three servants that a master entrusts to not only running his estate while he is gone but being good stewards of his monetary resources as well. Each servant receives according to their ability – one five talents, one two talents and the third, one talent. Now a talent is worth 6,000 denarii and a denarii is worth one days wage so a talent is worth 6,000 day’s wages. For the average Californian salary, that would calculate out to over 2 million dollars! Thus, the 5 talent servant is getting around 10 million dollars; the 2 talent servant four million dollars and the one talent servant 2 million dollars! Point – they are receiving a lot and being entrusted with a lot of resources that are not their own nor did they earn! Even the one talent servant has a boatload of money at his disposal. Jesus says that each is given according to their ability. A secondary point of this parable is that there are five, two and one talent kinds of people in the world that have different abilities and resources **as God has created and designed them to have**. The one talent person is not deficient and is not to compare themselves to the 2 or 5 talent people. And the 2 and 5 talent people are not to look pridefully down on the one talent person as if they are better. No, each are designed as God wanted. Take comfort and courage with your abilities and resources. Don’t under or overestimate them. Examine and reflect and humbly and accept your God-given abilities! And then what?

Jesus’ primary point is not so much on our design and abilities, but on our use of them. The 5 and 3 talent servants get to work when the master leaves. They take seriously their responsibility and want to honor their master by being productive with his resources. In other words, they want to be good stewards. Stewardship is a biblical practice that recognizes God as the Creator and rightful owner of all. He is the one that makes people capable of making money and contributing to society (Deuteronomy 8:18). He is the one that equips us and empowers us to do his will at home, at work, at school and at play (Philippians 2:12). We are not kings who give the orders but servants who receive the orders. We are not originator of our abilities and resources but the receiver of them. We are the created and not the Creator. We are supposed to “steward” God’s gifts and resources as he wants and not as we want. That is what it means to be a good steward. A bad steward would utilize the gifts and resources for their own selfish ends or just be lazy and not use them at all. For all three servants, the expectation is that they would use their abilities and resources to be productive for their master. The five and two talent servants do just that – they double the resources given to five and two more respectively. They went to work. They labored and intentionally put their skills and talents to use for their master and when he returns, they offer it all back to him! That is good stewardship. The master’s response to them is completely affirming and approving and encouraging. He says, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” Notice three things. (1) The master’s assessment of the two productive servants – good and faithful. To be a good servant (disciple) is to be a faithful disciple to the masters will and purposes. (2) They are invited to enter into the joy of the master. That is, all that is his is theirs to enjoy and more importantly, the company with and life-giving relationship of the master. They are being treated not as servants but as children. Furthermore, they are given even more resources to use on behalf of their master. He shows his value for them by giving them even more responsibility. How cool is that! (3) Why they were called good and faithful. They were both faithful to the masters wishes and desires and were productive with what they were given. Faithfulness means to be productive for Jesus. It means to get after the “good works” that we were created to do as ones who are saved by grace. The “through faith” is the



outworking of this saving by being faithfully active in bearing fruit for Jesus Christ in and through the equipping and empowering of the Holy Spirit (but that is another sermon!). Jesus makes this crystal clear with his response of contrast to the 1 talent servant – a highly discordant note emerges from the beautiful and harmonious chord of the previous two.

The discordant note of Jesus is a note of disapproval. The one talent servant approaches the master after the five and three talent servants. The one talent servant does not go to work with his abilities and talent. He buries it instead to give it back when the master returns. What does he do with all the time he now had on his hands since he was not working for his master while he was gone? The text doesn't say but it is implied that he goes about doing whatever he wants to do – anything that is not what the master had asked him to do and expected him to do and entrusted him to do. He does his own thing. He disobeys. He rebels. He betrays his master. So when the master returns and it's his turn to report to him, what does he say? What will be his approach to his master? It is accusation and attack! He accuses his master of being a hard man and attacks him for reaping where he doesn't sow and gathering where he does not scatter seed. Master – you are the problem, not me! Don't blame me for anything. What I did was justified. You are in the wrong! You are the bad guy here! You are the one that needs to change your ways! You are the one who is corrupt! You need to apologize to me! Wow! The servant plays victim with the master being the bully and abuser. The master is unjust and the servant is a victim of his injustice.

How does the master respond to this brazen attack on his character? "But." A single word that signals a significant amount of contrast. The master will refute and reject and counter this wayward servant. Notice four things the master says to this servant. (1) The master's assessment of this servant is "wicked and slothful"! This is in contrast to the "good and faithful" that greeted the other two servants. Jesus calls it as it is. The servant doesn't care for the master or love him or delight in him. He isn't for him at all but against him. Jesus calls this "wicked." (2) The counter to being faithful is being slothful. That is, faithfulness actively produces works of productive fruit bearing. Slothfulness is neglecting and not doing what you are supposed to do. It is abandoning your responsibilities and being lazy, unproductive and inactive as servants to the master. Note that being slothful and lazy does mean laying in bed or being a couch potato all day. It simply means not doing what you are supposed to be doing for your master or boss or teacher or parents. You can be busy with a thousand other things and still be slothful because your busyness is not about the good work that they are expecting from you. (3) The master says that the servant is culpable, that is blamable because if "he knew" those things about the master then the right response would be to not bury it but to invest it and at least make some interest on it. At least then you would be somewhat productive on my behalf. But no, you did not do this so (4) take away his one talent and give it to the one who has most. Why? Jesus turns this into a principle: "For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." This is the more commonly understood, "use it or lose it." Principle. If it is not going to be used in good stewardship to the master, the talents (resources) will be taken away and given to one that is being a good steward for they have shown their faithfulness and loyalty to the master. Furthermore, the wicked servant who is lazy and slothful will be taken away to the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (hell) while the other two servants will be left behind to enter into the joy of the master without the wicked servant's evilness to damper a thing! The images of weeping and gnashing are graphic pictures of the misery (weeping) and



anxiety and stress (grinding of teeth) of being completely surrounded by evil, injustice and wickedness (and contributing to it yourself) and apart from the love, mercy, grace and kindness and abundance of God. To be saved is to be spared the weeping and gnashing of teeth and those blessed with salvation by grace and are good stewards of God's skills and resources will be given even "more" as a reward for their faithfulness.

A word of caution is always needed when we talk about works (even good works). Scripture makes it clear that we are not saved by our good works but solely by the grace of God. However, it also makes it clear that good works are the natural and expectant result of being saved and give credible and coherent witness to God's saving grace for us. Good works do not earn our salvation but are the expectant evidence of it. As James says in the New Testament, faith without works is dead. That is, genuine faith works. It is active in service to Jesus of Nazareth as his witness both verbally and visibly as we strive to live faithfully as his disciples by shaping our lives into the image and likeness of Jesus through prayer, studying and applying scripture, attending and participating in the local church and being active with our skills and resources both in the church and outside of it, especially to the marginalized – the sick, imprisoned, poor and hungry. To that we will give great focus on next week. For now, are you an active participant in God's unfolding divine drama or a passive observer? Are you utilizing the gifts and resources that God has entrusted you and expects you to use for him and his kingdom? Are you being a good steward or acting more like a king? Are you making up excuses and blaming God for your lack of productivity and activity or are you confessing and repenting of your slothfulness and waking up to the good works that God is calling you to do in the power and person of the Holy Spirit? If Jesus came back right now, what would he say to you? "Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." Or, "You wicked and slothful servant...cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Will you be prepared and ready for the return of THE Master and THE Bridegroom and hear him say, "Welcome! Come on in to the marriage feast for I know you!" OR, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you."

The five foolish young ladies and the one talent servant were completely complacent to the bridegroom and the master. They were not ready because they did not know him and therefore did not take him seriously. The one talent servant was inactive because he was not for his master but against him. Their complacency stemmed from unbelief. And the result was complete cut off and removal from the presence of the Bridegroom and the Master. Jesus is exposing the true believer from a fake and giving a warning for his disciples about falling into complacency. Each one of us, while striving to be good and wise servants can become complacent at times. We can get caught up in the rip current of complacency. The longer we are in it, the more dangerous it becomes as we get swept farther and farther from the safety and security of solid land, of solid ground, of a solid rock – Jesus Christ. We can get caught in our own things and become unaware of the danger we are in. We can become more like our culture than our King. We can image a political party, sports player, entertainment celebrity more than Jesus of Nazareth. We can get caught up in a victim mentality, a slothful mentality and become unaware of the great danger we are in as we cease acting like disciples of Jesus and act contra to our identity and purposes.

Many studies and surveys over the years has consistently shown that many folks do not utilize their abilities and resources within the church. Over and over again it has been shown the roughly 20% of



the people in a congregation will do 80% of the work and that 20% of the people in a congregation will provide 80% of the giving (financially). This is known as the 20-80 principle....and it is a travesty and an embarrassment to the Church. The New Testament, in its treatment of the church makes it quite clear that every believer has God-given abilities and resources that they are to be utilizing for “the building up of the saints.” Every – single – capable – person. There is no biblical concept or principle of not serving and utilizing your abilities and resources at the local church you attend. 1 Corinthians 12 is one of the many passages about being active in the local church. It likens the church to a body in which each member is a particular part of the body and is supposed to contribute to its over all health according to its ability. A toe is to act and contribute to the body by acting like a toe and providing stability and support for standing, walking and running amongst other things. The eye is supposed to act like an eye and provide sight for the body. An ear hearing and so on. If the toe, eye or ear decides participation with the body is optional and opts out, the body suffers and that person is, according to our passage, acting wickedly and being slothful and not ready for Jesus to return. While not all churches are as bad as the 20-80 principle, every church I have known suffers from it to various degrees. Why is this? Well, there are many reasons that factor in but I’ll share a simple one that we all can work on together to help create a culture where serving with your abilities and resources is normative, not optional. One reason is that the Church has borrowed from the business world and overused the word “volunteer.” To volunteer for something strongly implies that you have a choice to participate or not. It is up to you. It is optional and not required. It would be helpful but no worries if you are busy with other things. This is in contrast to the work that they are required to do according to their job description they agreed to with that company or boss. It is not optional but necessary. Volunteering is the opposite. That is the meaning and baggage of the business word, volunteer. While there are a few things in which the church can ask for volunteers, the vast majority of serving within the church are not volunteer opportunities. They are places of service where people with the appropriate abilities and resources are supposed to be serving (as the toe or eye or ear etc.). Teaching and hospitality and mercy and singing and leading and many more are not volunteer driven but are to be engaged by people in the church with the appropriate abilities and resources. The church is disabled when people choose to act like volunteers and not necessary members of the body. The church suffers and the person is in danger of being swept away by the rip currents of complacency. So let’s eliminate (or drastically reduce) our use of the word, “volunteering” and instead use the term, “serving.” Let’s stop looking for volunteers and instead seek servants. Let’s stop incorporating business language and utilize biblical language. Why? Because volunteerism in the church breeds complacency.

And, complacency breeds unawareness and contempt and inactivity. Three dangerous postures that do not allow us to wait well for Jesus. To wait well for Jesus is to answer the question, “What am I supposed to do while I’m waiting” with the answer of being ready by being active in service to Jesus of Nazareth, every day. It is being the wise and good and faithful servant, known by the Triune God. It is embracing Jesus of Nazareth by first recognizing and allowing him to embrace us through the gospel and then actively seeking to be participants in God’s work today through the empowering and equipping of the Holy Spirit to produce the good works and good fruit of faith that glorifies the giver of every good gift and catalyzes the joy of the faithful. May we be wise, ready and aware of the rip current of complacency. May we be active participants, utilizing the abilities and talents given us by God to be productive disciples of his today. Amen.



### **Communion Meditation**

The Lord's Supper is an act of worship to our living and reigning King Jesus that awakens and orientates our thoughts and desires to God. It grounds on the solid Rock of Jesus Christ and anchors us more strongly to him so that we don't drift away by the dangerous waters of the rip currents of complacency. Our profession of faith is a succinct proclamation of our beliefs regarding the saving work of God through Jesus Christ. May we strive, in Christ to be ready for his coming by being active participants in the good works of faith that he has called us to.

Professing: (Apostles Creed)

**We believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
Born of the virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose and ascended to heaven  
Where he is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come to judge the living and the dead.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,  
The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, "this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

**Remember and believe that the body & blood of Jesus was given & shed for the forgiveness of sins.**

**Song** – O Come O Come Emmanuel -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utpZAlcWFU>

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourn in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, Thou Dayspring come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high  
And order all things, far and night  
To us the path of knowledge show  
And cause us in her ways to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel*



*Shall come to thee, O Israel.  
O come, Desire of nations bind  
All people in one heart and mind  
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease  
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**Sending as Disciples of Jesus:**

Disciples of Jesus are not characterized by complacency although they can get temporarily caught up in it. They are characterized by being ready and active in the obedience of faith that arises from the good news of Jesus' saving work on their behalf. Jesus is reigning and has entrusted us to use our abilities and resources for him and his kingdom. In doing this, we reign with him and for him. This is the "with" life that disciples of Jesus are characterized by. May these sending words continue to shape us more into the image and likeness of Jesus of Nazareth as we wait for him to return again. And yes, "O come, O come Emmanuel"!

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**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Therefore, as we are sent into the world by him, let us make disciples of all, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. And let us remember and treasure that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. Amen!**