

The Rev. Steve Best  
St. Thomas Church  
Pent. 24A; 11.15.20  
Zeph. 1:7; 12-18; 1<sup>st</sup> Thes.  
5:1-11; Matt 25:14-30

## **A Parable for our Nation**

There is no doubt about it. The church's lectionary readings in November proclaim the end times. The prophet Zephaniah predicts that the arrival of the "day of the Lord" will be filled with God's judgment and distress. The apostle Paul warns that the "day of the Lord" will come like a thief in the darkness of night and we are to remain awake and sober.

Jesus, himself, alerts us that we too need to be awake and attentive—using our gifts wisely-- or we too could find ourselves in a worse place than we are—a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth. As apocalyptic as the imagery happens to be in today's lessons, our human destiny needs to be seen from the vantage point of salvation, what brings us in touch with saving grace, and the courage to heed God's righteous judgments, make the hard decisions that our lives require, and celebrate the life within us that Christ inspires.

In both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures there is the notion of the Day of The Lord. Often, we think of Sunday or the sabbath as the day of the Lord. But the more expansive way of thinking of it is the Day of the Lord is the moment in time when God has become wearied from watching and waiting and has decided to intervene in our lives in such a way that we are compelled to act. It involves risk, courage, faith and matters of conscience.

There are few places in our world where this is demonstrated more clearly and profoundly than in the lives of those who have or are currently serving sacrificially and courageously in the Armed forces.

Today we honor their service, but we also look to them as examples of courageous lives that our in the middle of the struggle for peace and justice in our country. Their moral and spiritual battlefields are dangerous often leaving them not only with post-traumatic stress but with a condition that has recently been identified as moral injury.

One such example is that of National Guard Major Adam DeMarco who experienced a crisis of conscience during his dedicated and extremely difficult service to our country. On June 1, 2020, as many of us vividly recall, in the aftermath of the police killing George Floyd in Minneapolis there were large demonstrations in Washington, DC and across the nation. At Lafayette Square in Washington DC near the White House, and St. John's Episcopal Church, federal police forcefully cleared peaceful protesters and clergy (Episcopal clergy I might add).

National Guardsmen were then ordered by their superiors to advance to the fence line of Lafayette Square Park. Fortunately, they stopped before engaging the demonstrators. However National Guard Major Adam DeMarco, was so shaken by the event he decided to speak out. In a congressional hearing, Major DeMarco testified that "In the days following June 1<sup>st</sup>, I struggled to process what had taken place, to the point where I was sleeping very little. I knew something was wrong, but I didn't know what."

Right as I speak, there are men and women in are Armed Forces whose jobs are already stressful enough, are wondering what they will do if this happens again as they anxiously await the transfer of power from one president to the next. Will there be another Lafayette square? These dedicated and brave military service men and women are left wondering if their gifts of service and talents will be used for the betterment and protection of the country they love and the Constitution they are sworn to protect. Or will their talents be squandered and wasted like the slave in today's story whose talent was buried and not invested because of fear?

Too often the parable of the talents is too tamed down when we only look at it from the perspective of our own personal development or a parish stewardship event—as important as they can be. But what happens if we look at the parable of the talents as a parable for our nation? America has been blessed with a great diversity of people and talents and it is up to all of us to make sure that not only are own talents are well invested for God’s kingdom but that we taking the responsibility to help others be encouraged and protected from their gifts, talents, and resources from being misused or not used at all.

I am proud to be part of a denomination that believes that this a ministry worth investing in. Some of the unsung heroes of our church are military chaplains whose very job it is to help military personnel and their families become all the God desires them to be and to face their challenges with grace and support. Carl Wright is our Episcopal bishop for armed forces and federal prisons. Bishop Wright, a person of color, and great dedication to his flock. At his consecration the homilist reminded him that he was called to become a living paradox as commissioned officer who doesn’t bear arms but fights courageously for the health and welfare of active duty for the military community and our nation.

The homilist gave Bishop a charge that is ours as well, “My prayer for you today is that as you go about this new ministry, you will never, never give the faithful any reason to believe that those bishops [who gathered around you to lay hands on you] were about the business of removing your spine.”

Yes, I believe the Parable of the Talents, is a parable for our nation and our time. Our future will be determined by our willingness to make healthy and live-affirming choices in response to God’s generosity and grace. We have a choice to make. Will we follow the lead of those who have the courage to follow a loving and generous God who rewards us for risky investing and the living out of our faith? Or will we lose our nerve and follow the path of the slave who chose paralysis and fear as

his God? As our former rector, Jeff Lee, was found of saying, “We don’t need to imagine God sending us to hell or a place of eternal gnashing of teeth, we are full capable of doing that all on our own!”

So when the Day of the Lord arrives and most certainly it has, may we all choose to use our talents and our nations’ talents wisely so we might all enter the joy of our Master and know that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. Amen.