

# Sermon Text for November 8, 2020

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*Zephaniah 1:7, 14-16 Matthew 25:14-30*

*“Parables as a teaching tool”*

As pastors we are charged not just to say something, but to say something that is meaningful. Some weeks I find myself more focused and able to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading and other weeks I find myself scratching and clawing at Scripture not always clearly revealing what ought to be shared which is meaningful. I don't know about you but I had a very difficult time focusing this week with the events that are happening across our country and with the election up in the air. I shared in my enews my experience in Florida in 2000 as a pastor and how we waited until December 12 for the final result of that election. So, my focus was not nearly as laser during the week as it has been in previous weeks.

We also begin a new sermon series this week and it is one that serves as a placemark as we approach Advent in a few weeks and then in the new year we will begin another sermon series. I would love to do another book of the Bible, but am looking to you to give me some suggestions on which book of the Bible you would want me to cover for a sermon series. Remember, as you have seen, I don't just cover a few chapters, we spend a lot of time in each of the books that we have covered so far. We have covered together John, Genesis, the Apostles' Creed, James, Romans, Acts, and we just finished up the Lord's Prayer. So there is a lot of the Bible that we have not yet covered, so what book of the Bible do you want us to cover next? Let me know if you have a suggestion.

The sermon series that we are covering today is called a season in the Lectionary. So what is the lectionary. The lectionary is a three year cycle of Scriptures that have been chosen ahead of time by people smarter and more spiritual than me and they are supposed to cover pretty much the entire breadth and width of the Bible. They are used in many churches, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, basically all of the mainline churches as a way for people to be able to walk into any church on any given Sunday and you know what Scripture is being used and you can take comfort in the consistency and the continuity that you can find. I am bit rogue because I choose not to use the lectionary but rather I prefer to make my way through the Bible from book to book.

But for this season, in this time before and during Advent, we will be using the lectionary Scriptures that are provided for us. Please know that these Scriptures have been prayed over, that Christians all over the world, literally, today, are hearing a sermon on this specific Scripture

and we will all be on the same page as we move forward through Advent. So we are part of a much larger church as we read this Scripture together. Today we find ourselves in a parable which has been seen as one of a series of parables described as three parables of faithful waiting. Since the election we have been waiting, and so it is somewhat appropriate that we hear this topic today. We will see a little later on what a parable is, but let's just begin by saying that it is a story, and with any good story you sit down to read it. So let's hear a parable, a story which was given to us by Jesus.

**(sit down)**

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

Every Friday when I have chapel with the kids we act out the Bible stories and they seem to love that. I give them choices on who they can be in the Bible stories and almost every parable contains those who do God's will and those who do not do God's will. I call them the bad guys just so that the kids know what they are signing up for, that in the end of the story they are not going to be the protagonists, but they will have to act out that which they are not really supposed to be doing. Some of the kids love being the bad guys. This parable has good guys and bad guys.

Let's first define what a parable is so that we can all be on the same page as we go through it. Webster's defines a parable as a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle. So it is a story, the story itself was never meant to be a true story, but the story illustrates a true and important life principle. There are 55 parables in the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It was absolutely one of Jesus' favorite way to teach what he was trying to get across to his disciples and to the world, and so we should understand that as a favorite way that Jesus is trying to get across his lessons to us as well. In fact, the disciples heard so many of Jesus' stories that they ask him in Matthew 13:10, so Jesus, why do you speak in parables? Why are you always telling stories? And he responds by saying that he wants things to be clear to his disciples, and for those who do not know him, for those who choose not to pay attention to his teachings and the morals of his stories, well, then they will not understand what he is saying.

We need to be those who understand what Jesus is saying in his parables so that we can obey his commandments and so that we can do that which he has told us to do in these stories. What are some of your favorite parables? The good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the sheep and the goats, the parable of the lost sheep, the sower and the seed...there are so many that have made their way into Christian art and into our hearts as we identify as that prodigal who has

come back to be embraced by his father, or as we identify with the older brother who has been there all along and is feeling somewhat overlooked. These stories, these parables evoke so many memories as to when we were children and we heard them for the first time in VBS or in Sunday School.

Today we have the parable of the talents, it is a parable that I shared with you exactly 9 years ago in 2011 on a stewardship Sunday. It is that year that I gave all of you \$10 and asked you to use it in a way that it would multiply, and you did. Some of you may remember that Sunday or you may remember what you did to multiply that \$10. This parable, this story of the talents, go ahead and look at it again if you have your Bibles, is set up by a question that we find in chapter 24:3 when Jesus' disciples ask him when the temple will be destroyed as he said it would be at the beginning of the chapter. He then goes on a series of teachings about the end times and tells us that we will never be able to know or predict when Jesus will come back again, that it will be like a thief in the night, and that we have to be ready for judgment day to come at any moment. So this is considered what we call a judgment parable, much like what we hear in Zephaniah.

Let's look at our Old Testament reading where we find the day of judgment, the last days, the day that I think many of us is looking forward to, a day when Jesus will come back and claim us as his own, a time that we have always seen as a celebration, well, there seems to be a bit of warning in that Scripture. We are told to be silent on that day, and also as we wait for that day by the way. The day of the Lord is going to be happen at the desire and at the action of God and it is not dictated by us. God will prepare the sacrifice, one that we saw in his son Jesus Christ, our Savior. God will consecrate his guests, and we are his guests, we are welcome to, here's another parable, the wedding feast. Zephaniah warns us that the day is near, that is what Jesus said as well, but then he describes it as a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom.

Match what Zephaniah says about the day of the Lord with what the master says to the slave who hid his talent and you hear a similar story. The outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth. We have always used this parable as an example of how we ought to use our gifts and our talents here on earth in order to be ready for the kingdom of God when it comes again. That is a good message, that is a great message, it could even be the moral behind the parable. That could be our moral message for this parable. We have other Scripture to back it up: I Peter 4:10, I Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:7. Brothers and sisters use the gifts that God has given you for

the good of the church and for the good of this community through this church. That is a great message.

But as you take this message how with you today, it loses its meaning if it is not in the context of the reality that the day of judgment is coming. Jesus is coming back, and if we do not have a personal relationship with Jesus then we need to be fearful of that day of the Lord. The master had a very different relationship with the two who were industrious and did their due diligence than he did with the one who did nothing. I was afraid of you, I knew you were demanding and a harsh man. Those are not the words of someone who loves you and trusts you and is willing to do anything for you. Our relationship with Jesus Christ has to define who we are and this parable, and all parables, assume that we have that relationship. But I don't assume that with any of us, it is our responsibility to check ourselves and ask that question if we are ready for the day of the Lord, for judgment day.

Family, the teachings of Jesus are eternal. The return of our master is a crucial part of our faith, that we are not living just for our own selves, but for the one who created us and who is coming back to claim us. Yes, we should look forward to the day of the Lord, we should anticipate it and expect it, but our work is not that of waiting passively by, but rather one of acting and being involved. Let's do that together.

Amen.