

Judges 4:4-10 and Mathew 25:14-30

“A king like no other”

It always strikes me as curious that whenever I am gone from this church and find myself across the country in settings where there are gatherings of other Presbyterian Churches within our denomination I am so grateful when I return that I am your pastor. We have a great thing going here at First Presbyterian, especially when you see what is happening in other churches within our denomination. We are not a large church, but within our denomination we would be considered a large church. Over 75% of PC(USA) churches across the country have less than 75 people in attendance on Sundays.

Last week Beth Feiler, our children ministry leader, and Nicole Keays, our office manager among other things went to Charlotte to a conference hosted by Union Seminary extension campus in Charlotte and of the 10 churches there we were by far the largest and when I mentioned that on any given Sunday we can have 30 children in worship they looked at me as if I had come from another planet. We should never gauge how we are doing based upon other churches, you should always gauge it based upon your own past performance, but it was nice to see that what we are doing is actually kinda fun and exciting and bringing people to a deeper faith in Jesus.

Immediately after that conference I went to our denominational headquarters in Louisville where between in person and online there were over 100 people like me, Moderators within their Presbyteries who were meeting to be trained in being a Moderator. I mentioned in my enews that unbeknownst to me sitting two chairs away from me was Bailey Pickens, she preached here back in 2012 or 13 when she was a student at Yale Divinity School. She was in my confirmation class in Florida, went on an Italy mission trip. I was extremely close with her family, her younger brother spent a summer with us in Moscow while we were serving there. But there she was, a moderator just like me. It would be like if in 15 years while I'm still your pastor Connor Allison and I meet up somewhere random and he happens to be a pastor and a Moderator within our denomination. It was nothing short of cool.

What we are doing here has significance and it is having an impact on all of our journeys of faith and upon the faith journeys of our children that are growing up in this church. But wait, there is more. At the last Presbytery meeting on Tuesday, one of our youth, Emma Wilson, was voted on to become a YAAD, a Young Adult Advisory Delegate to our General Assembly in Wisconsin this year. And wait there is more, Walter Kondratowski, was given the green light to

pursue his ordination as a candidate. I'm not just here to give you the news of what is happening in our church and in our denomination, I am here to give you the good news. What we do here, matters. And what we are doing here is some good work. Keep it up.

Welcome to Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of our liturgical year before Advent begins next week. Both of our Scriptures today describe a ruler, at least someone who is in charge, who expects and requires those serving them to actually put to work that which they have been given. Let's read.

READ

Seth Gregory compiled together for our Mission and Finance Committee which then reported it to our session the surveys that you filled out in regards to mission. They are fascinating. There is a strong desire to maintain local mission and ministry while international or domestic mission away from our home base is emphasized quite a bit less. We have just gone through what I have classified a year of mission where we have welcomed and brought in people from the mission agencies and organizations that we support around the globe. We are alive in our mission and our desire to send out people to proclaim the Gospel and to be involved in acts that reflect our desire to see the Gospel spread.

This past week a group of students went to Christ home to share their presence with those in that home. We send people out to do mission and ministry. Today we are welcoming to the church people who want a meal, the youth are offering a free meal to anyone who would come by and might want one. First Presbyterian, we continue to see our calling as being mission focused and that is one thing that I love about us.

Our denomination has changed its approach to mission recently. A few months ago they brought home all of the missionaries that were serving overseas on the field, all of them. We are in a phase that has been called a gathering phase, which when you only focus on that, then the sending which has to be a necessary part of any church's mission, falls apart. As a denomination we do well in gathering, but we no longer send, at all, I mean at all. We are good at making the table bigger around us, but we no longer go out on the highways and byways to bring people to the table.

That is not true of who we are as a church here in Strasburg, but again, as I said, we are an outlier in our denomination. Jesus' parable in Matthew falls in line with the other parables that we have been seeing up to this point. It describes a master who goes away and leaves

behind three of his workers to care for his possessions. They are left with 5 talents, 3 talents, and 1 talents. A single talent would have been worth in today's money about \$250,000, so that is an extraordinary amount of money that he is leaving behind to be taken care of.

Again in this part of Matthew we see this theme of the Messiah being away but he will be coming back again, we just don't know when and so our responsibility is to be ready when he comes back. Our first Scripture with my favorite Judge in the Bible, Deborah, see that she is not delayed, but rather that those receiving her commands, Barak, are not taking her seriously and so as a result he misses out on the victory that could have been his. Someone else gets the victory because he was not willing to follow the ruler who told him how to be ready and how to conquer.

I don't know how else to emphasize what we have been hearing and how important it is to be ready. Today we are emphasizing what we are to do while we are waiting for Jesus to come back. He is coming back, we don't know when, and we have to be actively waiting. We see in the parable that each of the three servants as soon as they get the money they go and do something. The first one, and we can assume the first two, live out what the king has given them and don't just sit on it like the third person.

Again, as we have seen in the previous parables, this master is gone a long time, vs.19, for us it feels like a long time since Jesus has come and as we saw in other places the question arises what are we to do all this time that we are waiting? The first person who receives from the master it says that he worked that which he was given. Both he and the second person receive the praise that we are all looking forward to receiving: Well done good and faithful servant, well done, come and enter into the joy of your master. They both comes forward and they are both rewarded in this way.

The third one, probably witnessing this parade of success, feel concerned about his status and so he takes the stance that Adam takes when God is seeking for him in the garden. He casts blame for his inability to see past his own needs. Remember Adam when he was confronted by God said: the woman that you gave me. He covered pretty much everyone except himself. Here the servant blames the master because he knew that he was a harsh man, expecting more than potentially what people could offer.

But he says something that is brutally honest and that impacts all of us at one time or another. He says: I was afraid. Each of us has been given talents. This is where this term talent

comes from. We use it today to describe one's natural ability to do something. America's got talent, they have skills that come from somewhere. Here we say that they come from the master.

Each of us has talents that God has given us. This is a non-negotiable truth. Every single person here has something that God is able to use for God's kingdom and this Christ the King Sunday we celebrate a most generous king. But for this third person, the master's giving him his talent was not an honor or a privilege, but a burden and onerous responsibility which produces a terrifying fear of failure. One factor is evident here in this parable. The servant has no love for the master. He is really only interested in himself, and actually is only interested in his own security and not the service for his master. His goal was to keep himself safe, not find ways to serve his master.

In Romans 12:3 we hear that we have each been given gifts according to our own ability. Very similar to the parable here. If we do not use those talents then we are merely interested in preservation. This is true of a denomination, this is true of a church, this is true of an individual. If you are not working to gain disciples of Jesus you will inevitably fall into the preservation mode which is the kiss of death for churches. It is hard to gain, and it takes risk, you have to move outside of your comfort zone and you can't just bury what you have and hope that the king will be satisfied with what you were given without it being worked at all. That is not how it works. It is easy to preserve what you have until you don't have it any longer.

We find ourselves this Sunday when we are celebrating our 50 year members. They have seen this church at its height, with close to 400 people in worship on Sundays, to its depth where they were wondering how they would pay the pastor for that month. The more we use the talents that God has given us, and take risks with those talents, the more we are able to see the hand of God at work. Each person in our parable has to choose on their own what to do with the talents that they have received. There is no directive from the Master to do this or to do that.

We baptize our newest member this morning. My prayer for Liam and for all of us is that is that we don't choose fear and just focus in on ourselves in our mission or in anything that we do. There are obligations for those who have gifts given to them from God and when fear is present it can get in the way of those obligations and the use of those gifts. The emphasis today is on positive action as opposed to fearful inactivity.

Another way to see it is that faithfulness produces blessings and unfaithfulness results in loss. I want to leave us with Scriptures that point to how we are to use our talents. Look at I

Peter 4:10, then again I Corinthians 12:7. Our goal is to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, and that takes risk, and that takes the desire to work for the common good. May God bless us and keep us as we work together for the King. Amen.