

**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Sunday closest to November 16**



Proper 28

Year A

RCL

Zephaniah 1:7,12-18
Psalm 90:1-8, (9-11), 12
Matthew 25:14-30

The Collect

The Collect

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.Amen.

AMEN

Zephaniah 1:7,12-18

Be silent before the Lord GOD!

For the day of the LORD is at hand;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
he has consecrated his guests.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the people

who rest complacently on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,

“The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do harm.”

Their wealth shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.

Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;

though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.

The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;

the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter,
the warrior cries aloud there.

That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.
I will bring such distress upon people
that they shall walk like the blind;
because they have sinned against the LORD,
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.
Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the LORD's wrath;
in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be consumed;
for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Psalm 90:1-8, (9-11), 12

Domine, refugium

- 1 Lord, you have been our refuge *
from one generation to another.
- 2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
or the land and the earth were born, *
from age to age you are God.
- 3 You turn us back to the dust and say, *
“Go back, O child of earth.”
- 4 For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday
when it is past *
and like a watch in the night.
- 5 You sweep us away like a dream; *
we fade away suddenly like the grass.
- 6 In the morning it is green and flourishes; *
in the evening it is dried up and withered.
- 7 For we consume away in your displeasure; *
we are afraid because of your wrathful indignation.
- 8 Our iniquities you have set before you, *
and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
- 12 So teach us to number our days *

that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus said, “It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and

trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invest-

ed my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

SERMON

Jesus said, “It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

Presbyterian teaching is that like the talents the master left in the care of his servants, so faith is given into our care. Once given and received, we are bound to ask prayerfully, “What is my responsibility for that which was given me?”

Forgive me, but as I look out on the world, I see people who believe that God will be satisfied if they go to church regularly, give regularly, and don't, personally, involve themselves in evil things. They remind me of the servant given the one talent who then buried it in the ground rather than risk it.

Then the one who had received the one talent also

came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.'

Jesus' parable tells us that the amount given to each servant was "according to his ability". Burying your gift of faith in the church house for fear of God is to squander the wonderful gift you have been given. God has work for you to do and He expects it to be done with courage. Too often we play deaf, dumb and blind to that which God hands us. That seems to be what is happening in Alabama right now. Trying to justify abuse of children by invoking Mary and Joseph was beneath contempt and I pray that the man who did this shall come to see the error of his ways.

That's a separate issue. Our task is to determine what is to be the church's response to the evil we are learning

about. Is silence sufficient? Will God be pleased if we bury our talent in the earth, remain sanctimoniously quiet, then return to God that which was His to begin with, or can we own the issue which is presented to us, and thereby help the world gain better understanding?

Of all the cases Kathy and I handled while in office, the hardest were those having to do with sexual abuse of children. Let me say up front that I know that speaking about that makes you uncomfortable. It made Kathy and I uncomfortable as well but the demands of our jobs meant that we had to hold our noses and focus our attention on it. Can the church do less?

Let's face the issue head on. The abuse of a child in this way is not about sex. It is about power over another, and it is not far from a murder. It leaves scars for a lifetime because children have no way to process what is happening to them. Tragically, they often blame

themselves. The people who are refusing to engage what happened, who say that the accusers must be lying because they waited so long to come forward should have shared the time Kathy and I spent with the terrified and confused children with whom we worked. Perhaps then, they wouldn't say such uninformed things.

I spent most of my adult life listening to people recount, as witness and as victim, what had happened. Do that long enough and you develop a nose for the truth. If you saw the video this week of the taped interview with one of those children, Beverly Young Nelson, as she tried to recount, even forty years later, what had happened to her, you you would be convinced, as am I, that she is telling the truth, and the truth is that a portion of her childhood had been murdered. Beverly Young Nelson is telling the truth when she reports that her abuser told her, "You are a mere child. I am the District

Attorney. If you tell anyone what happened, no one will believe you.” He told her the truth. Who would believe a 17 year old waitress’s outrageous complaint against the “District Attorney”? That is the soul of this story. It isn’t about sex. It is about those with power objectifying vulnerable people. In a sense, the more outrageous the conduct, the less credible the victim becomes because those who refuse to think about it always attack the victim. They say, as was said this week in Alabama, that the candidate is a “man of god” who “wouldn’t do that” so the broken child is re-victimized by Christian people who fear soiling themselves by engaging this distasteful issue.

All of Scripture demands that we side with those who have been broken. Our Lord’s teachings call upon us to bind up the wounds of those who have been harmed, to offer support and healing. For some of the people in Al-

Alabama, that challenge fell upon deaf ears. They choose not to believe those who have told their stories. They hide behind an irrelevant question, “Why didn’t they come forward sooner?” and by asking it, they have answered their own question. They didn’t come forward because they wouldn’t be believed. They didn’t come forward because they would be vilified and humiliated rather than healed and supported. They didn’t dare to come forward earlier because what is happening to them now would have happened then, and been even more hurtful.

Every one of these cases upset Kathy and me and I’m sure the revelations this week upset you, as well. It would be even more difficult if you were an Alabama voter who had backed the one accused. As the evidence piles up, there is a natural inclination in all of us when called to acknowledge that we made the wrong choice

and backed the wrong candidate, an inclination to adopt a willful, finger-in-ears-la-la-la ignorance, pretending to believe almost anything to relieve us of the need to engage this tragedy now laid open for us to see. Church, we need to address this. Some men of power feel entitled to treat women (and young boys!) in this way because they've always gotten away with it. It needs to stop now. A gift of power in the entertainment industry or in politics is not a grant of permission to objectify and abuse those less powerful. The gift of faith is not a grant of permission to remain silent about issues we would prefer to avoid. Silence is complicity.

History teaches us that this behavior isn't a 21st Century novelty. During World War II, the Japanese invaded Korea and abducted very young girls, pressing them into service as "comfort women" – sex slaves. I never heard anything about it until I was quite an adult, so

deeply was it buried, but the wounds are still fresh. In 2011 Korea unveiled a bronze statue in front of the Japanese embassy. I put a photo of it in your bulletin. It is of a little girl, sitting in a wooden chair. Her fists are clenched. Her face is that of one who is angry about their treatment but unafraid and with the will to resolve the issue. Next to her is an empty wooden chair, an unspoken invitation to sit in the place of the victim and ask, “What if it was me? What if it was my sister? What if it was my daughter?”

There were enormous diplomatic consequences to the unveiling of this statue. The Japanese wanted that which had been concealed by silence to remain so. They demanded that it be removed. The Koreans refused. Threats and insults still turn the air blue between the two countries, the Koreans demanding that this awful abuse be seen for what it is, and the Japanese insist-

ing that it all happened a long time ago so it should be consigned to the dusty halls of history. But the rock of silence which covered Japan's sin for so long has been removed. The truth has been exposed. Duplicates of the statue began appearing all over the world. A visible truth cannot be hidden. This is why this present day evil must be exposed as well. It is in the shadows that evil grows. By willful ignorance and embarrassed silence, we bury our talent in the earth. I would suggest that it is time and past time for the world to say, in the words of Republican Senator Mitch McConnell, "I believe the women."

The field is prepared for tilling. The people are now ready to listen, and we must now speak. History instructs us that for countless men, the ability to possess women sexually is not a spoil of power; it's the point of power. It is time for the church to add its voice in sup-

port of the helpless, the abused, all those in the power of those who would harm them.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I've come into criticism for being at times "too political". I understand this criticism. It is much more pleasant to hide in the church house from the sins of the world. You woke this morning. That means God has granted you another day to be about His business. Take your talent, use it wisely and at the end, you will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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