The Lessons Appointed for Use on

Year A

Proper 28

RCL

Year A

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

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.

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.

The Response

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.

9 [When you are angry, all our days are gone; *
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.
10 The span of our life is seventy years,
perhaps in strength even eighty; *
yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow,
for they pass away quickly and we are gone.
11 Who regards the power of your wrath? *
who rightly fears your indignation?]
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 in-

vested 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

Did you ever wonder why we're here doing what we're doing? You and I have been attending church services every Sunday since Shep was a pup. Why? Is it a habit, or is there more to it? Here's one answer. Jesus spoke a parable about investing. A rich man was going away and he divided his wealth among some slaves. When he returned, he expected a profit on the money he had entrusted to them and, sure enough, two of the three slaves doubled his investment. A third slave, though, hid the investment for fear of losing it, and he did not fare well.

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.

The question Jesus was directing His disciples toward, I believe, is the same one I opened with: what are you doing here and why are you doing what you are doing? Are you an observer or an investor in God's creation?

When I was a kid, there was an unfortunate community at Oakview and 13th Street called Avondale. We boys called it a VON de lay to mock the people who had to live there. For the benefit of those listening in on the Internet, Avondale was a slum, a muddy swamp on the banks of an open sewer. It was filled with ramshackle houses and inhabited by the poorest of the poor. We boys from up the hill were strictly forbidden ever to go there, but we often crossed the woods to a large outcrop of rock we called, imaginatively, "the Big Rock".

From the Big Rock, we could observe Avondale while still not violating the injunction never to go there. We boys were observers, but never investors in anything that might have made life easier for the people in Avondale.

Well, given the limitations of being a ten year old boy, I don't know that there was much we could have invested in the people of Avondale. At least, that's the reason we gave for only sitting on the Big Rock and gawking at the unfortunates, but in discussions about the history of Ashland, I found several people who attended Crabbe Elementary, the school that served both Avondale and the surrounding, less miserable neighborhoods. These people told me of playing with the children from Avondale, even visiting some of the homes, which they described as tidy inside. Think of that! Kids that didn't live in misery were reaching out from the

common ground of Crabbe Elementary and, because they were kids and didn't know they were only to gawk at Avondale, actually made friends of the children of Avondale. Talk about an investment!

The adult community of Ashland, however, was another matter. Avondale was no secret. It was allowed to fester for generations. Even more ironic, the people who lived there were Sanitation Department workers and Floodwall maintenance people. Why were people doing such vital jobs made to live is such an awful place? Why was no effort made to install even sanitary sewers? Why was no investment made by the adults?

Eventually, the people of Avondale were run off. The city razed it, but instead of building habitable low income housing, the city built tennis courts. Did the city make an investment with which Jesus would have approved?

The world is filled with misery, with people who suffer from lack of food, from lack of clothing, from preventable disease. The world also offers us many opportunities to involve ourselves in projects that seem to make the world a better place (like tearing down a slum to build a tennis court) but which leave the misery untouched. Why, oh why do we so often choose the alternative that makes the world LOOK better rather than the alternative that would make the world BE better?

This week, while browsing Facebook I saw a meme which spoke to me. It consisted of two photos, the top one of children pledging allegiance to the flag, the bottom of a child giving food to a beggar. The text on the top photo said:

Maybe instead of teaching our kids to respect flags and anthems

The text on the bottom photo of the little boy feeding

the hungry said:

We should teach them to respect justice and humanity.

This meme captures so accurately the conundrum each of us are faced with daily – do the easy, attractive thing that leaves the misery in place, or undertake the difficult, heart-breaking thing that addresses what is wrong with the world? That is what Jesus was teaching His disciples. God's grace will be given unto you, but it's your job to invest it wisely.

There is a catch, though. History teaches that any effort to change the ways of the world to more closely reflect the will of your Father will be received only in anger. I can think of few better contemporary examples than that of the rage touched off a few years ago by Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the National Anthem. What an American is supposed to DO during the

National Anthem is to stand. Colin Kaepernick chose instead to BE a symbol of the failures of this country to live up to its stated ideal, “One nation under God with liberty and justice for all”. Just as everyone was aware of the misery of Avondale, we are all aware of the systemic racism that dictates that people of color earn less and have less access to health care. Kaepernick’s actions brought these inequities center stage. He MADE us choose whether to address our sin and invest ourselves in correcting it or to hide ourselves and not see. Far too many of us chose the latter. What would Jesus teach of such a choice?

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.

Let's remember that two thousand plus years ago, being a Christian was not the comfortable bed we find it to be today. Jesus and His disciples died martyr's deaths for their investment in a better world. The question I would pose is this: Do you think our world, 2,000 years later, is in any less need of change? Father Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote:

> **Many churches decorated with words announcing salvation and new life are often little more than parlors for those who feel quite comfortable in the old life, and who are not likely to let the minister's words change their stone hearts into furnaces where swords can be cast into plowshares, and spears into pruning hooks.**

Sitting on a comfortable pew cushion to sing familiar hymns requires no real investment nor sacrifice such as Jesus and His disciples made. No sword can be cast into

a plowshare in such a tepid furnace! Attending church without being willing to let the minister's words change your stone heart into a furnace is a cheap way to feel you have done the right thing, but nothing is changed by such a farce. Respecting justice and humanity requires commitment and if followed, the world IS changed.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Jesus tells us time and again that we have a calling here. Your Father has invested His grace in you and He expects a return on His investment. If you choose to hide that which was given you, if you choose to go through the motions without moving the world, however slightly it might be, in the direction to which you were called, you may expect your Father's displeasure.

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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