

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15 ~ Matthew 25:14-30

The Eighth Day of Creation

September 1, 2024 ~ 15th Sunday after Pentecost ~ Holy Communion ~ Labor Day Sunday

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Introduction:

Yes, our gospel lesson is from Matthew 25! So you may be thinking, "Wait, didn't I hear something about us being a Matthew 25 church? That's the one about the sheep and the goats and feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger. Bingo! This is Matthew 25. But Matthew 25 is a very long chapter (it weighs in at 46 verses) and today's parable comes right *before* the one about the sheep and the goats, and our call to feed the hungry and welcome the stranger.

I am taking a moment to set today's parable in its context for two reasons: First: In the broad arc of Matthew's whole gospel, these Matthew 25 parables are the very last teachings Jesus lays on his disciples before his passion, and crucifixion. Perhaps that's why the tone of them is quite intense. Spoiler alert, this one ends badly for the one who gets it wrong: outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth. And the second reason is this: as the FPC family of faith, let us consider how today's parable lays the ground for "our" Matthew 25 parable. In one sentence: We must use our communal gifts and talents to fulfill our Matthew 25 bold vision. Or else. Yes: what we do or don't do with what God has given us, makes a difference.

Just one more thing before I read it, drawing from our first scriptures lesson. Our creator God from the beginning formed all of us "to keep and to till the ground" as we heard Greg read in Genesis 2. This origin story teaches us *why* God created human beings: To continue the work of God's creation. This purpose, this "job description" came *before* Eve was created or the strangely articulate serpent starts talking to Eve. Friends: labor in the garden, in the vineyard--is our divine calling, *not* our punishment. Not only is it our calling, but we are to enjoy our work. Did you know that we Presbyterians have been confessing our faith in "joy" since 1649? Question 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks: "*What is the chief end of man?*" The answer: "*Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.*"ⁱ

I invite you now, as I read the parable of the talents, to do something a little different. Try to hold onto the joy of the first two servants. While we more naturally gravitate toward feeling sorry for the slave who buried the one talent he was given and what a horrible end he comes to. Listen this time for the call to partnership, try to feel the joy and the agency the other two are granted by the master.

Communion Meditation:

Did you ever wonder if you might be a "Creative?" That's a term that was coined back in 2002 by Richard Florida in his book, "*The Rise of the Creative Class.*" Although his basic argument about "creatives" as a socioeconomic class has undergone a questionable trajectory, the term "Creatives" lives on. If you have wondered whether you are a "creative" or not, here are 6 of the signs you might be:

1. Do you constantly pursue new ideas even when there is an uncertain outcome?
2. When things go wrong, do you break down or jump up to find answers?
3. Do you love solving problems through unconventional means?
4. Do you have the habit of questioning or challenging the norm or status quo?
5. Are you a risk-taker?
6. Do you keep at your new ideas or your art no matter what other people may say?ⁱⁱ

According to popular culture, if you said “yes” to 3 or 4 of them, you are a “Creative.” But here in this place, Beloved Community, where we believe God is our Creator and we are all God’s creatures: I’m here to tell you that *every* person on earth is by definition, creative--Whether you said “yes” to any of these or not. Or think of yourself as “creative” or not. All sentient creatures, by definition, are creative. And if you think about it, these six questions point to a person of faith, seeking to use the talents given to them, living how Jesus taught us to live. They point to a way of living and moving and having our being in light of being God’s creations, formed to continue God’s work on earth.

So right now, “Creatives” let’s bring these lofty, cosmic concepts into this room of tool belts, spatulas, and stethoscopes. Think to yourself for a moment: in your life so far, what jobs have you had? You’ve probably had some you loved and some you hated. And others you tolerated. It’s a paycheck, right? Let’s take about 60 seconds right now, to share with a person worshipping near you, one job you have had (at any time in your life) that you either loved or hated and why—from your first paper route or babysitting job, to your highest promotion that you never thought you would never ever get. One job you have loved or hated and why.... Find your person.... 1,2,3, go!!

I wish I could have heard every conversation that you all just had! We are given multiple gifts, multiple jobs that fill the span of our days that we are given to live and breathe on this earth. In every person is the creation story. Since the first day, you heard it in Genesis, since about, 4.54 billion years ago, the Spirit has brooded over the formless, dark void of our lives, calling us into existence through our gifts until they are developed. A process that takes a lifetime. Whatever phase of life you are in right now, you still have gifts yet to discover. And to deploy in the workforce of God’s creation.

I’m going to let you in on a secret here at FPC not widely shared. Every Session meeting begins with one session member, one of our “Ruling Elders,” sharing some form of “Faith Sharing” – either part of their faith story, a favorite Bible verse and why, or a faith statement. Sorry, next year’s Nominating Committee! Now that I have let that cat out of the bag, perhaps I have made your job of recruiting Elders a little bit harder. Seriously, although most elders resist (and maybe even dread their month as it approaches) when it is their turn, this faith sharing part of the meeting has become a highlight. And a great way to get to know one another on a deeper level.

Their faith stories bear witness to how God’s calling forth of our gifts over the course of our lifetime has many chapters and twists and turns. The work, the labor, the co-creating to

which we are called, does not remain the same, but continues to evolve throughout our lifetime, in rhythm with our physical, mental, and spiritual abilities. Perhaps the sharing you did moments ago reminded you of this in your own life so far. Consider too, how God uses both our prior training and experiences, on and off the job, to call us into new forms of work to build up God's kingdom.

Contrary to the traditional (and sometimes toxic) messages derived from The Parable of the Talents, is full of joy and good news. Did you notice how comparing yourself with someone else – like the two talents or the five talents guy—is unimportant? The first two are given the exact same response for their efforts from the master. The message is this: If we use *whatever* we are given, our lives will expand, and our capacity will double. We are all promised the same reward—the joy of being a co-creator, in partnership with God. Everyone gets the gold medal. There are no silver or bronze podiums.

“Creativeness in the world is, as it were, the eighth day of creation.” Wrote Nicolas Berdyaev, Russian philosopher and Christian existentialist (1874-1948). As Elizabeth O'Connor has written in her book titled, the *Eighth Day of Creation: Gifts and Creativity*,ⁱⁱⁱ our work here as a church is to be a “gift-evoking, gift-bearing community. God knows, given the state of our nation and our world, God needs all hands on deck. Including yours and mine. We have been given a heavy agenda, Team FPC: the repair and restoration required to further God's dream of peace and justice stands waiting. Henry David Thoreau put it like this: “Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of too much life. Aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something.”^{iv} I will say that last part again: “Be not simply good; be good for something.”

I will bring this sermon to a close with this little story that Sister Joan Chittister tells, “Once upon a time, there was a seeker who was troubled by all the beggars, and the broken and the beaten he observed while sitting on his prayer rug. Looking up to heaven, the seeker cried out, “Great and loving God, look at these and do something!” And the voice came back from heaven, “I did do something—I made you.”^v

ⁱ *Book of Confessions, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 1, “The Westminster Shorter Catechism,”* Q. 1, (7.001).

ⁱⁱ TCK publishing.com, “What is a Creative? 10 Signs You Might Be One,” by Yen Cabag

ⁱⁱⁱ *Eighth Day of Creation: Gifts and Creativity*, (Word Books: Waco, TX, 1971),

^{iv} Henry David Thoreau, as quoted by Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*, (HarperOne: New York, NY, 2009) pp. 107-120.

^v Joan Chittister, *The Monastic Heart: 50 Simple Practices for a Contemplative and Fulfilling Life*, (Convergent: NY, NY, 2021) p.116.