Using our Gifts in God's World

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 15 November 2026

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 • Matthew 25:14-30



1 Thessalonians 5:1-11: Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters,[a] you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, beloved,[b] are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; 7 for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Matthew 25:14-30: Jesus said, 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents,[a] to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 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." 21 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." 22 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." 23 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." 24 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; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." 26 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? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 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. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."'

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Do we use our talents? How interesting that Jesus' parable today concerns talents (the money) but suggests talents (those things that we can do). God gives us different gifts. We've talked about this often. God is generous and give us what we need to survive. When we say "Give us today our daily bread," it does not necessarily mean that God will make food appear; but he will give us what we need to gain our bread. He will give us intelligence, perseverance, and particular talents which will enable us to earn our livings.

Some people seem not to be equipped for this world. We all know people who have not "done as well as expected." Is it that God has not equipped them? Or is it our expectations that are in error? How does God expect them to survive? Is it not through the help of others? Jesus tells us to help the widows and orphans, and by extension, to be generous in giving to any people who have very little of their own. But I think it is true that some people don't really use their gifts to their full potential. It is always a challenge in helping the needy: we are told to be cheerful givers, particularly if we ourselves are blessed with abundance — though remember the widow's mite! She gave out of her poverty, even down to her last coin. We can reasonably expect others to help themselves to the extent of their abilities, using the gifts God gave them; but we are still to be generous, for it is God's will that we help each other.

I never really thought about not going to university; everyone in my immediate family had done it, my father and mother, my sister and brother; so I followed suit. I figured I would do well, since I'd been a pretty good student in high school. But when I got there, I found many distractions: new friends, parties in the dormitory, marching band, etc. I went from being a good student to a pretty mediocre one. And when I think about it now, I really think I missed out on a lot. You can always meet a friend or have a party, but there were such good learning opportunities there. I could have studied languages, I could have studied theology or history, I could have seriously studied the trumpet or guitar — so many options. Instead, I really wasted a lot of time. And I feel now that in doing so, I wasted the gifts that God gave me. I wasn't a Christian then, so I didn't feel that way at the time. God gave me comprehension and good reading ability; I could write pretty well; I had some music ability and some facility with languages; and I didn't use these talents to the full. He must still have guided me, though, because I didn't mess up entirely: I did graduate with a degree. But I failed to use what God gave me in the best way. That is a sin, for what God gives us is always precious and should not be wasted or ignored.

I get along with other people pretty well, and I suppose that is also a gift from God, for there are certainly many people who have trouble in that regard. Maybe I overused that gift, to the point where I was spending all my time having a good time, and not using my other gifts to actually get an education!

On the other hand, since I gave my life to Christ and particularly since I was ordained a priest in God's church, I feel I am using my gifts much more worthily. I can write: I write sermons and bits and pieces for newsletters and such. I can speak in front of people: I preach. I can sing and play guitar, and I do so here. I enjoy studying the Bible and theological texts; and I still value

being able to get on with other people. So I pray that God is more pleased with the way I'm using his gifts.

A gift may become an obstacle to faith, if not used correctly. The business person who makes money so easily may end up worshipping the money rather than the God from whom it all came. The great singer or athlete may let the praise of others go to his head, and think of himself too highly. In such a way do we create idols of created things, rather than focussing on the Creator.

I read an article the other day about an event in America. From the article:

> Hundreds of Christians gathered on the National Mall on Oct. 31 for a day of prayer and repentance, while organizers said millions around the world watched on television networks and livestreams.
>
> The event, dubbed the Sacred Assembly, brought Christians together in a call for spiritual renewal, continuing a long American tradition of national prayer for the nation. Held three days before the midterm elections, the gathering marked the culmination of the Nehemiah Alliance's 52-day prayer initiative.
>
> Organizers said participants joined from all 50 states and more than 100 nations.

It's always encouraging to hear about such gatherings, and there have been similar initiatives in New Zealand and elsewhere. The initiative in Washington was started by a woman named Barbara Ann Jeter of the Nehemiah Alliance, when she visited the White House with about 70 other women Christian leaders last year.

William Federer, a historian, has studied and written about Christian faith among the past Presidents of the United States. The article goes on:

> In 1863, at the request of the U.S. Senate, President Abraham Lincoln set aside April 30 as a national day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer as the Civil War ground on.
>
> "Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us," Lincoln wrote.
>
> Federer said that is the passage he most wants Americans to remember.

This self-centredness — "too proud to pray to the God that made us" — is epidemic in much of the Western (and therefore, supposedly Christian) world today. We take God's gifts for granted, use them for our own betterment, and congratulate ourselves on our cleverness; when the proper response would be humble thanks to God. Lincoln mentioned the "redeeming and preserving grace" of God, which is a free gift, and can be received and accepted by all. In light of it, what else can we do, except give thanks and put our faith in Jesus?

Yet many fight it and insist on self-determination. That's not the way the world was made — it is the way we have made it, in denying God.

Our gifts from God are meant to be used, in the service of God, to help God's people, and to his glory. Let us rededicate ourselves to our Creator. In Jesus' name. Amen.