

Wednesday, February 14

Matthew 25:14-30

As we begin this Lenten journey together, I ask that you look again at this much beloved passage of scripture. As we read through, I think it is our custom to identify with the first two servants. They were, after all, rewarded with the words “well done my good and faithful servant.” But as I look at this passage afresh, I find both compassion for the third servant and a sense that maybe that he has been unfairly treated in our collective memory. That third servant took what could be understood as a bold and dangerous position in refusing to allow the harsh master to make money off of a corrupt system. He valued the comparatively little treasure that he had, and ultimately took a stand for what he believed in. Look at verse 24 again:

“Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.’”

It wasn't sloth that guided his actions, it was a belief that he wanted to be faithful, he wanted to follow God's law instead of the law of this harsh servant. Maybe just maybe, it is the third servant that truly should be lauded for his efforts. Maybe, to be faithful means that we are willing to put ourselves in a position where we have to take a stand against harsh pressures in our world, where we are willing to be different in order to stand up for what we believe in. This Lent, we have the opportunity to explore, to explore what it means to be faithful. Specifically, for us, what it means to be faithful with our bodies and faithful in our finances. Where during this season will we have to take a stand? Where will we have to make some decisions for the Lord that are challenging and that will bring us into a position to challenge the general practices of others in this world? I'm not sure when it will happen, but I know that when it does we'll be able to face it together. Let us pray for one another's strength in this Lenten journey. Together we can make it through this season and making it through this season will draw us closer together.

Meditation: Have you ever looked at a passage of scripture that you've known for a long time and seen something new? Are you willing to let familiar passages speak new life into you? Have you ever been put in a position where you had to take an “unpopular” stand because of what you believe in? What strengthened your convictions? How were you able to remain strong even when there is great pushback?

Prayer: Most gracious and all-wise God, as we begin this Lenten journey together, bind us together as one. May we realize that though the road of faith often feels lonely we are truly never alone. Remind us dear God that we can draw the strength to stand strong for you both from the power of your Spirit and from the presence of one another in our lives. You are worthy God of all our praise and all of our devotion, help us to show you that through our dedication to you during Lent and beyond. In your great name do we pray, Amen.

Pastor Adkins-Jones

Thursday, February 15

Psalms 51

David cries out to the Lord in verse 1, “Have mercy on me, O God. “ You can feel the heaviness and brokenness of his heart. He is beside himself with regret and pain. He knows he has sinned against God but he is also trying to find a way to forgive himself. Forgiveness is a process. David demonstrates raw bold repentance. He acknowledges his sins in verses 1-3. He asks the Lord for a fresh start in verses 7-10. David then asks God in verse 12 to restore him with “the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” An unrepented heart is unable to see and feel the joy of the Lord.

We are sometimes quick to point out the sin in others but we have to bear our soul to God the way David does here. Before we are able to truly know the goodness of God we have to be honest with our shortcomings with God. We can see that David truly repents. He is free in his brokenness, which enables him to testify of God's goodness. This runs contrary to our cultural notion of power. But the

truth is we cannot begin to move forward with our faith walk, our relationships with others or our service to the Lord if we do not repent. God isn't looking for perfect vessels just forgiven souls.

Meditation

Have we truly been honest with God about the things that are weighing us down? Have I taken the log out of my own eye before judging others? When was the last time you stood before the Lord stripped down and broken? Do you truly understand that God loves you just as you are? Have you forgiven yourself? Have you repented your sins?

Prayer

Dear merciful Lord, create in us a clean heart before you. Lord, humble us and keep us near the cross. Please, dear Lord, forgive us our many sins. Give us the strength to lean on you. Help us to see your beauty and sing your praises. Amen

Minister Antoinette Ellis-Williams, Ph.D.

Friday, February 16 Hebrews 12: 1-14

Discipline in the face of adversity- It's not a Sprint it's a Marathon We Rejoice in God's discipline because discipline is a manifestation of God's love.

When we hear this, we think of harsh beatings and punishments. When in fact, God is often reminding us that he will correct us, push us beyond what we think are our limits, all some trouble so that we know we can persevere by faith. The ancient writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews compares our faith journey to race of the Greek runners. These were harrowing races; we are reminded of the runner's strict training and determination.

As we step out of the runner's metal blocks toward our Lenten Journey, we are aware of the challenges that await us. We know we must have a certain mindset, we must know the direction we are

headed toward and we must be prepared. No runner of merit, just gets dressed one day, approaches the runner's blocks and then takes off running. This behavior would deem the runner "disqualified"! The runner who wants to win, HAS A COACH, has practiced, has stretched her muscles, trained with other runners, checked out the track a few times, studied the competition, timed her run, looked out for obstacles on the track, knows how to pace herself, is aware of number of strides needed to reach the goal and is dressed to win the race! The runner desiring to WIN has had some falls and some loses but She refuses to stop running. We are motivated by the runner's CODE.

Our Lord and Savior was sent forward to save humanity, he knew his mission, he studied diligently, prayed often, had been tempted by Satan (so he knew the opposition well), rested when necessary, was not seduced by his friends accolades nor was he intimidated by his enemies rebuke. Our Lord followed the guidance of his Father, surrendered his will to God's wisdom and proceeded to the Cross-and a Triumphant Resurrection. God's Love for discipline manifested in Jesus's Love for Us.

This too was the race run by our ancestors. Through lynching and maltreatment, they trusted God, Persevered in times of trouble, were patient in Prayer and Finish the race.

So, in the early days of our Lenten Journey let us strive to exhibit the same discipline of the runner. The baton has been passed to us, we learned some things from those who went before us, and we are guided by the God of yesterday and all days. Our opposition will not thwart us, the pain of the race will not discourage us, and we will not allow anything to pull us down. Here we go!

Meditation: Do we have what it takes to make this Lenten Journey on the Road to the Cross a triumph? Some things may try to get in our way and weight us down, but we will run anyway. Our bodies may be bruised and ache along the way but we hear the cheers from those who went before us. WE can do this!

Prayer: Dear Lord God, our strength, our guide, the light in the darkness.

We need you to help us on this Lenten Journey. We seek to know you better. We seek spiritual healing and awakening. Thank you for loving us enough to bring us into discipline. Motivate us, renew our minds, strengthen our muscles for the race, remove the obstacles that trip us up and push us forward. Amen & Amen

Minister Renee Brown Johnson

Saturday, February 17

John 1:29-34

“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Those words by John capture the true essence of why we celebrate the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. John understood that it wasn’t about himself, it was about Jesus. Indeed, John was sent by God to baptize with water, but the one greater than he was to come; the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. John was spiritually aware, he had eyes to see not only the natural, but the spiritual. How glorious it must have been for John to see Jesus approaching him and recognizing Him because he was told that you will know it is Jesus when you see the Holy Spirit descending upon Him. During this time of fasting are we aware of Jesus moving amongst us by the Holy Spirit? Do we, like John, have the spiritual eyes to see the Holy Spirit moving and working in our lives and in the lives of others? Suppose John had not recognized the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus? Would he have therefore not recognized the Savior also? John was one well known to fast and pray. Some things come by praying and fasting only. The word “only” is the operative word. Most of us have been baptized with water, but we understand through this scripture that we need also be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Jesus came to baptize His believers with the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God that teaches about and strengthens us for the trials and tribulations of this life. Let us not refer to the Holy Spirit as “it,” but as the third personage of the Holy Trinity who allows us to recognize Jesus moving in our midst.

Meditation: Have you been missing the great things God is doing in your life because you are only focused on the trials you are going through? Do you understand that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to comfort

you even in your darkest hours? The trials are only to strengthen you, and the Holy Spirit is the teacher and comforter during those times.

Prayer: Our Lord and our Keeper, give us eyes to see and ears to hear as you bless and speak to us through the Holy Spirit. Keep us humble as you use us and exalt us. Let us always remember it’s not about us, but it’s about You. In all the good that we might do, let us remember that it is to glorify and magnify your Name, and not to feed our egos. It is you who we serve, and not ourselves. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

Minister Upshaw

Bethany Baptist Church

Lenten Program

February 14, 2018 — February 17, 2018

“Being Faithful Over a Few”



Matthew 25:23

²³His Lord said to him, ‘Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

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