

[Judges 4:1-7](#)  
[Psalm 1231](#)  
[Thessalonians 5:1-11](#)  
[Matthew 25:14-30](#)

A SERMON PREACHED BY THE REVEREND ALISTAIR SO ON THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, NOVEMBER 16, 2008, AT ALL HALLOWS' CHURCH, SOUTH RIVER PARISH, IN DAVIDSONVILLE, MARYLAND

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have several very timely lessons in our lectionary today. First, as confusing as the lesson from Judges may seem, we now know that "Barak" (Barack) is not only a Muslim name, but also a Jewish name in the Old Testament, meaning "blessed" or "happy." And therefore by extension, it can also be a Christian name. Second, as the economy has been inundating the American psyche in recent days, and as we see the stock market values and our retirement plan earnings plummet to new depths, we have the Gospel of the 401(k) in the Parable of the Talents!

Yes, seriously, this is a Gospel lesson about our future, about our retirement. And it is well blended with the lesson from Judges in which Deborah the prophetess predicts the triumph of God in the victory of his people. Our triumph will be of God in the end.

The Parable of the Talents is the Gospel of the 401(k) because a talent is quite a lavish amount of money, about fifteen years' wages for a typical worker. A talent here is not to be confused with usual definition of the word meaning skill. The master of the story gives talents to his three slaves to invest.

Depending on their investment strategy or lack thereof, they will yield different results. The master symbolizes God who gives us many talents so freely.

The first two slaves are called "good and trustworthy" because they set out immediately with the treasure entrusted to them. They embody the earnest and faithful disciples of Christ who hear Jesus' words and act on them. They act on them by carrying out the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. They share the abundance of God's grace and multiply in faith, hope, and love. Essentially, they grow richer by spending.

The third slave is dubbed "wicked and lazy" because he is a reflection of Jesus' admonition that "everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a man who built his house on sand." (Matthew 7:26) And what are "these words" of Jesus? In the context of Matthew 7, "these words" refer to the importance of building our faith on the firm and solid ground of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. "These words" refer to Jesus' teaching for us to be non-judgmental, sincere about our motivation, discerning about prophecies and doctrines in every age. Jesus wants us to be active bearers of the Good News. Jesus wants us to invest our spiritual wealth wisely, in building up each other, and in sharing the abundance of God's grace with each other.

So here we have the best spiritual investment advice: to act on the Gospel and to invest in the divine message of mercy, truth and forgiveness. The future belongs to God, and these are the values of the future. And now it's the time to invest in these values of God.

This type of godly investment starts within our hearts. God is the source of infinite goodness and mercy. And we can partake of God's goodness and mercy freely. But we first must be geared toward that goodness and mercy. In other words, we need to have faith in God. And having faith in God means that we're willing to forgo our negative thoughts and eliminate our negative energies. Having faith in God means that we

actively rid ourselves of small behavior and rely freely and expectantly on God's deliverance of us from all evil, anxiety, and oppression.

You see, this is really simple mathematics. There are three stages in our spiritual health. First, as I just mentioned, we can be in the negative. Second, we can be at zero, when we don't hold grudges or brood over actual or perceived injuries, and when we don't feel the need to do much else. We're at best lukewarm in our faith. Third, we can be in the positive, when we feel energized and motivated about the work that God has given us to do, and when we are becoming the embodiment of God's infinite goodness and mercy in our time and space. We focus on the Gospel message of mercy, truth, and forgiveness. At this stage, we are always ready to let the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, help us to get rid of our fear, paranoia, anger, malice, road rage, bad language, so on and so forth.

Being a Christian of peace, being Christ's ambassador of mercy, truth and forgiveness, is the essence of our spiritual stewardship. And that is the deeper meaning of the Parable of the Talents. Indeed, how we invest our spiritual gifts is a reflection of what kind of God we believe in. Our Epistle of the Day, the First Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, comforts and assures us of God's goodwill for us:

**For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.**

Indeed, we are building each other up every Sunday when we gather in worship; we are building each other up when we sing our hymns with fervor; we are building each other up when we say our prayers wholeheartedly; we are building each other up when we eat breakfast together, share an afternoon tea, or cheer over a pint.

**Brothers and sisters, building each other up is the holiest spiritual investment you can make as a parishioner of All Hallows'.**

Let us summon a renewed spirit of Christian charity and love; of service and responsibility where all of us resolve to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other.

In light of this new charge in the life of the Risen Christ, are we tithers or tippers? That applies both to our spiritual and financial stewardship. Most of us are somewhere in-between. But what direction are we moving toward? Are we working toward building up each other for the exciting journey of faith ahead of us?

May we be inspired by these words of Archbishop and former Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, Peter Carnley:

**" We do not approach the practice of religion...as though it involved having all the answers... Rather we see ourselves as being on an open-ended journey into a future to which we are called by God, a journey of faith and hope, in which there is always something new to learn, a mind-set to be expanded, a perception of things to be stretched, a deeper wisdom to be discerned."**

Amen.