November 15, 2026
Proper 28A
Trinity, St. Louis
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

*Judges 4:1-7*
*Psalm 123*
*1 Thessalonians 5:1-11*
*Matthew 25:14-30*

*In the Name of the One who was, who is, and who is to come. Amen.*

Today, we pray one of the most memorable Collects in the Book of Common Prayer. Before turning to the lessons, I want to take a few moments to look at this particular prayer, and how it invites us to read, and to hear, the Bible. Let's listen to the Collect again, this time in its original 16th century language.

> BLESSED lord, which hast caused all holy Scriptures to bee written for our learnyng; graunte us that we maye in suche wise heare them, read, marke, learne, and inwardly digeste them; that by pacience, and coumfort of thy holy woorde, we may embrace, and ever holde fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast geven us in our saviour Jesus Christe.

While many of the Collects in the Prayerbook are English translations of Latin prayers, this one is not. This one was written, in English, by Thomas Cranmer, the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, advisor to Henry VIII and Edward VI. He didn't fare so well during the reign of Mary I; he was burned at the stake in 1556.

In Roman Catholic practice of the pre-Reformation period, only some portions of the Bible were proclaimed publicly, and then only in Latin.[1] In 1549, Cranmer's new Prayerbook directed that the entire Bible ("***all*** holy Scriptures") be read, in public, in English, every year. As part of that effort, since 1539 (that's 10 years before the first BCP!) every English parish church had been required to have an English Bible (the so-called Great Bible) on the lectern. The Great Bible is sometimes called the "Chained Bible" because of the provision that it be chained to the lectern, presumably to prevent theft.

[1] Cranmer's Collect was originally assigned to the Secomd Sunday of Advent. The 1549 BCP was introduced on the First Sunday of Advent , so this Collect would have been heard as a clarion call for the Reformed view of Scripture. The editors of the 1979 BCP moved it to this day in favor of a new Collect that spoke of John the Baptist.

Cranmer's hope was that by hearing so much of the Word of God, the clergy might "be stirred up to godliness" and that the people would "be the more inflamed with the love of … true religion."

Now, my friends, I tell you all this not to give you a lesson in the history of the English Reformation (as enjoyable as that might be for me), but to remind you, especially in these days when we see the rise of radical white/right-wing "Christianity" just what is at stake in our consumption of Scripture; what we hear, read, mark and learn; what we inwardly digest; and what we internalize as "well, the Bible says so."

These days, when the current administration seems bent on cutting costs on the backs of the most fragile of our neighbors, it is easy to understand that we might hear only the end of today's gospel: "from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away," as an instruction, and to dwell on thoughts of the "outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In other years, you might have heard the Parable of the Talents in the context of a Stewardship Campaign. I, along with countless colleagues, have preached about faithful stewardship of time, treasure, and talent. This is not a bad thing to do, but I wonder if that approach looks at the Gospel not as a parable, but more like an Aesop's fable, where the moral of the story seems to be "use your talents, or else!"

Or else! There is, I think, a general sense among many Christians that, with the exception of some lovely Psalms, and some sweet stories about Christmas and Easter, the Bible is mostly about judgement, about hellfire and brimstone. Doors are shut, teeth are gnashed, and goats are sent to you-know-where.

How many of us carry around this understanding of the Bible? That there's a really bad place, full of really bad people who have done really bad things. As a result, we spend our lives scrambling to avoid those people and that place. And, in our anxiety, it doesn't take us long to point out, loudly, the exact punishments God has decreed … for them.

Why this is so remains a puzzlement to me. As an amateur armchair shrink, I wonder if it isn't a living out of our fear of not being seen and loved, maybe by our parents, certainly by God.

Here's a cartoon of what I mean. So, there I am, in line at the Pearly Gates. The line moves slowly. The gates open and close repeatedly, as each new person moves through. Eventually, I reach a big desk and give my name. St. Peter peers through an enormous book, turning page after page. He asks me again about the spelling of my last name (o-n or e-n?) and returns to his search. At last, and after a mumbled conversation on the phone, he stops, shakes his head, closes the book, and scribbles something on a

sticky note. Finally, he looks up at me, and says, "would you mind having a seat over there? Someone will be right with you."

If this is how we picture our life in God, like waiting outside the assistant principal's office, it's no wonder that we are obsessed with thinking about the judgement and punishment of other people, if only as a way to avoid thinking about judgment and punishment for ourselves.

Let me be clear – I am not being light on sin. I believe that we will all need to render an account of the things we have done and the things we have left undone. At the same time, if we believe that God's primary purpose is to punish us, and that our primary task is, somehow, to escape that punishment, our obsession with condemnation makes sense.

And, isn't that just sad? What in heaven's name happened to coming to the Scriptures with patience, and finding such comfort in God's holy word that we might "embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life"? So, what can we do? I imagine that Archbishop Cranmer might tell us to read more of the actual Bible.

There are a remarkable number of passages in the New Testament that appear to promise the ultimate salvation of all persons and all things. Here are just a few instances.

John 12:32: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself."

1 Corinthians 15:22: "For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be given life."

2 Corinthians 5:19: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

Colossians 1:19-20: "For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all."

And, to the point for today, from 1 Thessalonians (5:9-11): "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." Now, pay attention to what St. Paul says next. "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing."

So, let's turn back to the gospel. If the Parable of the Talents isn't about learning the moral of the story – "use your talents, or else!" – how are we to hear, read, mark, learn, etc., etc. this parable? Jesus' parables, especially the kingdom parables, always invite us into a reversal of our expectations. Maybe this particular invitation sounds something like, "no matter what you may think, God believes in you, God entrusts you with incredible blessings, God invites you into God's own joy!"

From this perspective, Jesus is revealing to us something essential about the reign of God, and invites us to live kingdom life in the here and now, practicing things like love, trust, belief, invitation, and joy.

When we are able to inwardly digest the biblical text this way, we are far less likely to focus on the "or else" bit, and more able to attend to the inability of that third servant, and everyone we know who is like him – unable to receive grace and blessing, because they are suffering right now in the outer darkness of debilitating fear.

Our calling, our task, our joy as beloved children of God, is to "embrace, and ever holde fast the blessed hope of everlasting life" …and then tell someone. Lean into that hope in the here and now. How, you ask? You already know how – but here are a few reminders.

If you find joy in the love of God as it is lived out here at Trinity, dig in. Invest more deeply with your time, talent, and yes, treasure. Then, remember to keep inviting someone you know to see what God is up to in this place.

If you know someone struggling with fear in the outer darkness, turn on the light of being present to them. You may not be able to fix what's wrong, but you can remind them that they are not alone.

You, my dear friends in Christ, are children of light and children of the day, so walk in this world as children of light, and encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. Amen.