

“ON LOAN”

24 Pentecost (Proper 28)      Matthew 25:14-15      19 November 2017

John D. Lane    Emmanuel Church    Staunton VA

Twenty years ago, I spent 10 days at the Episcopal Church’s General Convention in Philadelphia. I was staying at the Wyndham Hotel, perhaps a quarter-mile from the Convention Center. Every morning I would wake up, leave the hotel, get breakfast along the street, and spend the day—and often part of the evening—at the Convention. It would be ten o’clock or so before I got back home to my room.

When I travel, I always unpack and put away my clothes, moving in as though I own the place. After a few days, I establish a routine, and am as comfortable as possible. When I left the Wyndham, I grieved a little bit, even though I had had enough of the Convention, and was eager to get back to the family. I realized someone else would be moving later in the day into what had become MY room.

Some years back another family lent us their vacation cottage for a few days. We told the kids to be respectful of the place. We tried hard to do everything right, and when we left we hoped the place was cleaner and neater than we found it. We wanted the owners to know we appreciated the time away they had given us.

I’m 73 years old, and I think I can safely say I passed *mid-life* some years back. At some point I’ll die and be gone and probably soon forgotten. I’m not maudlin about that. It’s reality.

God has given each of us time on this earth, and our job is to make the most of this gift. The talents we have are from God. Using them is our job. The earth is on loan to us. We are renters, without an option to buy.

The Book of Genesis (1:26) says the following:

*Then God said, “Let us make humankind\* in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”*

“Dominion” is a combination of power and responsibility. We have power over the earth, we have the use of the talents God gives us, but we also have the duty to use both well. We are on the earth as someone who lives for a time in a hotel room, or someone who has been lent a vacation cottage. It’s a gift, but it’s also a responsibility. In the past year and a half, I’ve had two friends, both significantly younger than I, die suddenly. The message keeps coming back: life is finite, life is fragile.

*“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.”*

Today, we have the Parable of the Talents to bring us face to face with gifts, responsibility, and our temporal nature. The man has entrusted his three slaves with talents, each according to his ability, the text tells us. Our talents may be verbal fluency, athletic ability, or a winning personality. To Jesus’ hearers, it was also a sum of money.

A talent was 75-100 pounds of silver, the equivalent of 20 years’ labor at minimum wage. This wasn’t a penny or a quarter or even a double eagle. A talent was very serious money. In today’s terms, assuming you are making \$50,000 per year, you would suddenly have \$1 million to take care of. You hit the lottery, Baby! To interpret Jesus’ parable, always a risky business, God has given each of us a life of immense value. What we do with that life is up to us.

Bizzy and I raised 3 children. Deep down, we recognized the wisdom of whoever said, “Your children are on loan to you.” We had one or more of them at home for a span of 32 years. Now they are gone. We tried very hard to provide them what they needed before they left us. Like the slaves in the parable, we have been given a lot—and a lot was expected of us.

To me the Parable of the Talents is more about attitude than achievement. It teaches us God is in charge. God is the owner. We are not. We are all in this together. I often hear people say things like “my committee” or “my project” or “my church”, somehow neglecting the other members.

Reminds me of the story of two people talking about their churches. They agreed to disagree. So one of them—I like to think an Episcopalian—said, “You worship God in your church in your way. I’ll worship God in God’s church in God’s way.” It all belongs to God, after all.

How do we give thanks for all the gifts God has given us? Put them to good use. Help to show forth God’s glory in the world. Everything else is less important.