

Extravagant Opportunity

November 16 • 2008

Focus Scripture
Matthew 25:14–30
Additional Scriptures
Judges 4:1–7
Psalm 123
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11

Extravagant, loving God, your grace saves, your compassion gives life, your justice restores. Investing God, call us to risky adventures, to touch the lives of neighbours and strangers. In faith, hope, and love, we risk our lives for yours. Amen.

Jesus' teaching used an extraordinary image to encourage disciples to seize opportunities to serve neighbours and strangers. God's extravagant, life-giving love is not limited by traditional boundaries. It is found in unexpected and surprising places. Faith, hope, and love empower us to live as though the fulfillment of God's reign is imminent.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 25:14–30

Matthew 25 continues with another of Jesus' parables about the reign of God. Jesus uses money to visualize the power of God released in the world. It further develops Jesus' command to love God and neighbour, and provides a picture of God's Spirit at work. The parable encourages disciples to let God's life-giving grace and compassion flow through them as a power for good in the neighbourhood and beyond.

In Jesus' time, a talent was a huge amount of money – about 15 years' wages for a common labourer. Thus, the first servant received more than a lifetime's wages. Jesus reveals God as being ridiculously extravagant.

The first hearers likely found this parable controversial. Imagining God's reign as money at work would have been disturbing. Money often was an instrument of exclusion and oppression, and not associated with God's activity.

Such a controversial image alerted disciples to Jesus' interpretation of God's law. The parable tells of the owner's successful investments beyond the usual agents and clientele. The plot does not follow Matthew's usual sequence of Israel first, then the Gentiles. Could God's reign be wider and more inclusive than previously thought? This would have been a dangerous idea to the first hearers.

The third servant buried the "life of God," fearing punishment for underachieving. The judgment for this servant's lack of trust urges disciples to a radical change of heart and behaviour.

God's life-giving power let loose in the world brings a richly expanded capital of love and compassion. God's presence is acknowledged where disciples might not expect or even desire it. Disciples who take the risk to live as God directs will be shocked and surprised in the best possible ways by God's compas-

sion and people's response. Dare we allow God's love to push us into adventures beyond our imaginations, investing the gifts we receive for the sake of God's reign?

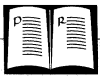
Some scholars offer a subversive reading of this text, suggesting that the parable offers the possibility of an "anti-hero" interpretation, pronouncing the third servant a hero. This servant refused to charge interest, which would have oppressed those who might have used the funds. This reading suggests that the reign of God is about God's justice and equity. This is how communities of disciples are called to behave. Notice, however, that this servant did not give the funds to those in need.

God works where God will work. In **Judges 4:1–7**, when the situation seemed hopeless, God was already at work to provide a leader and deliverance. God judges, but also sees and saves. The psalmist of **Psalm 123** brings together the interests of a master and a servant in the context of God's power for mercy.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:1–11** Paul imagines Christians clothed with the virtues of faith, hope, and love as they resist pressure to conform to society. Living and working as though the fulfillment of God's reign is imminent, disciples bring God's grace and compassion to all.

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God's life-giving love flows through the people of God into the wider community. Churches are called to embrace neighbours and strangers with extravagant acts of compassion and grace, working together to find ways to reach out to a universal community. How do you imagine you and your church are being called to take part in God's reign? How will you use God's gifts to you in faithful and extravagant service to God and neighbour?



Replacement biblical background page for **Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican** congregations using the **paired reading** stream of the Revised Common Lectionary is on the Congregational Life Paired Reading CD.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

