

## What are you waiting for?

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:14-20,

Psalm 90:1-6,9-10,12-14 (Hymnal: A Worship Book 819)

### What are you waiting for?

What are you waiting for? Snow on the slopes? Summer to return? Breaking Dawn: Part 2 or the Hobbit prequel to Lord of the Rings to be released? The weekend? Meaningful work? Or any work that keeps food on the table and a roof overhead? Citizenship? To settle down? To travel the world? Security? Change? Are you waiting...To find friendship? To fall in love? For the birth of a child? For a diagnosis? Or a cure? For your Movember moustache to fill out? Or your partner's Movember moustache to be shaved off? Seriously, what are you waiting for?

Waiting is surprisingly difficult, whether for a major life event or just a coffee. A Fed Ex ad astutely notes that: "Waiting is frustrating, demoralizing, agonizing, aggravating, annoying, time consuming and incredibly expensive."<sup>1</sup> At some point in our lives, most of us have experienced waiting that is demoralizing or agonizing. Even waiting characterized by excitement can be exhausting.

### The Parable of the Talents three ways

As advent approaches, we near the end of the Christian year and enter a season of series of scripture readings about waiting. This morning we heard "The Parable of the Talents." This parable is hard to understand. I have struggled with it and many commentators over the past couple of weeks. How we understand this parable depends a lot on how we understand the one who tells it to us.

#### **Capitalist Jesus**

Are we speaking with Jesus the ruthless capitalist? "To those who have, more will be given...but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."<sup>2</sup> At last, a Jesus for the 1%! "Increase your wealth at any cost," he proclaims, "Make risky investments. Let the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This is the will of God. This is what God rewards." Hmmm.

#### **Talent show host Jesus**

So what about Jesus the talent show host? Is our storyteller the Ryan Seacrest or Ben Mulroney of Galilee Idol? "Don't keep your talents hidden! Share them with the world! Take a risk," he cajoles, "Take the stage. You may get a recording contract....or at least avoid the gnashing of teeth."

Both of these options are distasteful, and rightly so. After all, this is the same Jesus who said that it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the reign of God.<sup>3</sup> And in biblical language, a "talent" has nothing to do with "Who's Got Talent." A talent is a unit of money equivalent to fifteen years of wages for a day labourer, hundreds of thousands of dollars today.<sup>4</sup> This parable is primarily *a metaphor that uses financial imagery*, not a discussion of how we use our money or our talents.

<sup>1</sup> David Maister. *The Psychology of Waiting Lines*. <http://davidmaister.com/pdf/PsychologyofWaitingLines751.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:29

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:24

<sup>4</sup> Richard B. Gardner. *Matthew Believers Church Bible Commentary*. 354.

So, if we are not speaking with capitalist or talent show host Jesus, who is telling us this parable?

### ***Apocalyptic Jesus***

Let me introduce you to apocalyptic Jesus. There can be no denying that Jesus and his followers believed they were living in the end times. This parable comes right in the middle of two whole chapters of apocalyptic teaching in which Jesus predicts that we will see, “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”<sup>5</sup> In Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica, one of the earliest Christian writings that survive, Paul warns that, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”<sup>6</sup> There have always been those in the Christian tradition, starting with Jesus himself, who wait for the apocalyptic end of the world.

Apocalyptic Jesus makes me uncomfortable. I don’t want to be associated with those Christians who expect the world to end...again...every six months. I don’t want to live each day waiting for Armageddon...and I’m not. I’m guessing most of you aren’t either. But if we aren’t waiting for Armageddon, what are we waiting for?

### **Naming our waiting in the language of faith**

We may not be waiting for warning signs that Jesus is about to return, or expecting to be caught off guard by a rapture that comes “like a thief in the night.” However, we are all waiting for something. We all know what it is like to wait.

What are you waiting for?

As followers of Jesus, we can name what we are waiting for with the language of faith. Behind our waiting we may discover a deeper longing for: justice, liberation, healing, joy, love, peace, within and beyond ourselves. What are you waiting for?

As followers of Jesus, and yes, this includes apocalyptic Jesus, we can name our waiting as waiting for the reign of God among us and within us, waiting for God’s abundant life for us...for all. What are you waiting for?

### **What do we do while we wait?**

The Parable of the Talents is a story about waiting. It is a story about what to do while we wait. While they the wait for the return of their master, three servants are entrusted with the task of taking care of his wealth. The servants have three options.

*The first option is to invest the money.* This is the risky option. This is the shady option. This is the choice of the first two servants...and they are rewarded?

*The second option is to put the money in the bank to earn interest.* Although it is probably the option most of us would choose, for first century Jews this would have been a shocking proposition. Jewish law banned usury, the charging of interest...and yet this is the suggestion of the master, who is often considered the God character in this parable?

*The third option is to bury the money.* In the first century, burying money in the ground was the one sure way to protect the funds. It was the safe and virtuous thing to do. Burying the money is the Sunday School answer. This is the choice of the third servant...who is punished for his actions?

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 24:30

<sup>6</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2

What is going on in this parable? It defies our expectations. In this story, being good and faithful servants in times of waiting is not about hunkering down obediently and playing it safe. *In this story, being good and faithful servants in times of waiting is about taking initiative, taking risks.*

### **Taking good risks**

Last weekend when the youth from Ottawa and Toronto got together to talk about our joint learning and service trip in March, we shared our hopes for the experience. One person shared that she hopes the trip will be “a good risk.” While we wait for God’s reign of justice and equality we take the risk of stepping outside of our comfort zones to learn and serve with people who can challenge and change us in ways we cannot anticipate.

As a recent graduate in tough economic times, I have a lot of friends waiting for work. I am inspired by those who use this time to take good risks: to start their own businesses; to pursue passions set aside during studies; to try something completely new and different; to give their time away as volunteers; to get out of bed each morning not knowing what the day will hold. While waiting for God’s reign of meaningful work and enough they take good risks.

In 2007, computer science professor Randy Pausch stepped in front of an audience of 400 people at Carnegie Mellon University to deliver a last lecture called, “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams.” Randy told his audience about the cancer that was devouring his pancreas and that was to claim his life in a matter of months. On the stage that day, Randy was youthful, energetic, and cheerfully, darkly funny. He seemed invincible. But this was a brief moment, as he himself acknowledged; he was waiting for the end.<sup>7</sup> Instead of retreating from the world while waiting for the end of his life, Randy took the good risk of sharing his story.

Whatever you are waiting for, what good risks can you take while you wait?

### **Trusting God in all generations**

Taking risks does not come naturally to me. I am very risk averse person. Especially when I am waiting, what I want to do most is curl up and bury myself in bed. I do not want to get out there and take risks. I identify with the third servant. How can I, how can we, have the strength and courage to risk?

“God, you have been our dwelling place in *all generations*,” we pray with the Psalmist. Our waiting and our risking is made possible by in trust in the generations who have preceded us, and who surround us today. We gain the strength to risk from the risk takers who went before us. We have the courage to risk because we know there is a community that will support us whether or not it works out.

“*God, you have been our dwelling place in all generations*,” we pray with the Psalmist. Our waiting and our risking is made possible by trust in God, whose timelessness overwhelms us and is present to us in the now; who journeys with us through success and struggle; who loves us, no matter what.

“God, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” We wait. We risk. We trust. What are you waiting for?

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<sup>7</sup> Randy Pausch. *The Last Lecture*. <http://www.thelastlecture.com/>