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Proper 28 (A) ~ 15 November 2026
St. Dunstan's, Bethesda
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Psalm 123
Matthew 25:14-30

Thy Will be Done

When I was in Middle School, I made a bold move.

Now, don't get too excited. Remember that everything is relative. And for this timid, afraid-of-her-own-shadow, incredibly awkward 12-year-old, what seemed bold to me was probably pretty mundane for other people.

So, adjust your expectations accordingly.

For me at that time, being bold meant switching from playing the clarinet – my beloved instrument since the fourth grade, at which I actually was pretty good – to playing the saxophone.

And the *tenor* saxophone, at that.

I wanted desperately to be in the school jazz band.

That's where the cool kids hung out.

(More specifically, that's where my crush, John, hung out. And he played – you guessed it – the tenor sax.)

But not only that: To set them apart from the concert band members, the jazz band wore these really *fine* red vests.

They were satin.

And shiny. You could practically see your reflection in them.

They were groovy. (It was the 70s, after all.)

I wanted to wear one of those vests in the worst way. I wanted to be special, set apart.

So I begged my band director, Mr. Elman, to let me switch. I was determined. I asked, over and over and over.

I think it might have bordered on harassment.

Finally, against his better judgment, Mr. Elman relented. He let me leave the concert band, where I sat in the front row and got to play the opening line of the *Rocky* theme song (dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-dun-da-DUN-dun-dun) with my colleagues, to play tenor sax in the jazz band.

I think I saw him cross himself when he said yes.

You probably can guess how that went. I was terrible.

And not just terrible: I couldn't get a single note out of the saxophone. I tried, with all my might, to draw enough of a breath to make a sound – any sound.

But I just looked like an anxious blowfish. I contributed *nothing* to the jazz band.

I thought that I could fake it – that I could just move my fingers spastically on the keys and *look* like I was playing.

This wasn't just Imposter Syndrome. I really *was* an Imposter.

And Mr. Elman knew. Everyone knew. And so, after weeks of trying to bluff my way through rehearsals, I finally was asked to quit.

I was devastated, and so embarrassed. And to make matters worse? I never got to wear the red shiny satin vest.

So I went back to the front row of the clarinet section. Where I belonged.

I tell that story on myself this morning because, painful as it was, it taught me a valuable lesson. I thought that, just because I *wanted* to be in the jazz band, I *should* be in the jazz band.

Even if I contributed nothing. Even though I didn't squeak out a single note.

My misguided ambition was about *me*, as an individual, not what was best for the collective, for the whole community.

It was about *my* ego – not to mention about that stylin' red vest.

We humans do this, don't we?

Sometimes, we lose perspective.

We fail to see the forest for the trees, as the saying goes.

We get so caught up in what *we* want (or don't want)…

> what *we* are doing, what's going on in *our* lives, or in the lives of our loved ones…

That we cannot see the bigger picture. Or hear the piece of music as a whole.

So often it's about you, or me, individually, rather than about *us*, collectively.

And so often it's *not* about God.

This morning's Gospel is what is sometimes called the "Parable of the Talents," a story that always seems to come around during Stewardship Season.

Funny that.

You know how it goes: A landowner gives three of his servants an amount to invest. The translation we just heard refers to "bags of gold," but the Greek says "talents" – which, in the first century, was currency. And it was valuable: One talent was worth several years' wages - maybe as much as 20 years - of ordinary labor.[1]

It was a *lot*. Think how much you make – or made – over the course of two decades.

So each servant decides how to he will invest the talents – or not. And while the first two do what they are supposed to, with varying degrees of success, the third squanders his talents because, in his words, he knows that his master is "a hard man," and he is "afraid." So he returns exactly what belongs to the master.

He thinks that's going to get him the gold star.

But instead, the master flies into a rage and rips the servant a new one.

We tend to hear this parable as a cautionary tale about investing one's gifts, one's "talents," for the greater good.

For building up the Kingdom of God, especially through the Church. Especially at budget time.

And certainly that's all there in the story.

But – *and:*

[1] https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/proper28a/#Matthew25%3A14-30=

What we tend to *miss* is how the parable begins. Listen again to the opening line:

Jesus said, "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey…"

The "it" here, by the way, is the Kingdom of God.

Notice who is the protagonist, the subject, of the story. It's the *man*, the one whose wealth is doled out.

The story isn't about the servants. And neither is God's Kingdom.

And, because we usually identify with the servants, it's actually not about *us.*

This parable is about the One Whose abundant generosity makes all things possible.

The story is about God.

It is about God's will, not our will – or our ego, or our fear, or our longing to belong and wear the groovy red vest.

It's about getting perspective.

The parable is about learning to see the big picture – or hearing the piece of music as a whole.

Ambition is not necessarily a bad thing. It is human to want to do well, to succeed, to "make a name for oneself." I believe that that longing, that desire, comes from God.

If we didn't have ambition, not much would get done.

HOWEVER: We always have to ask ourselves, *For whose glory is this?*

Is my striving to achieve, to feather my nest, for the sake of *my* reputation and comfort, or is it because I believe that it is what God truly wants – not just for me, but for *all* of us, for the flourishing of *all* of God's Creation?

Because like a human parent, who always has to balance the needs and wants of the individual child with those of the whole family, God is invested in the thriving of the Whole Family, of *all* of the created order.

Yes, God loves and cherishes each one of us as the unique and precious individuals that we are. We know this.

AND…God loves the big picture. The whole piece of music. Together we are all made in God's image and likeness.

So it's not just about what you or I want – as difficult as that may be for us to hear.

It's *Thy will,* not *my will,* or *your will*, be done.

And God's will, God's nature, is to be generous. That's yet another detail that often is overlooked in this parable. We focus so much on what each of the servants does with their allotment that we fail to notice God's abundance, God's generosity, God's amazing and unparalleled grace, in the first place.

In the words of St. Ignatius Loyola, "God will not be outdone in generosity."

God will not be outdone in generosity.

I'll end, as I began, with my own witness:

As most of you know, I think, in 2027 my husband Randy will become Bishop of Florida and will relocate to Jacksonville. I will follow him sometime later, likely at the end of the summer. And as some of you are aware, if I were in charge of the universe (or at least the Church), I wouldn't be going anywhere. For

months, in the run-up to the election, I stewed and grumbled and fretted about the possibility, and I gave God more than one piece of my mind.

How could Randy, how could God, do this to me?

Why did *I* have to change, why did *I* have to sacrifice? It didn't seem fair.

Let's just say that I was none too happy with either Randy or God for a long time.

Any then one day I finally got it. I had an epiphany, an "AHA!" moment, at last.

It's not about me. It's about what's best for the *whole* Church – and the unique gifts that Randy will bring to a diocese sorely in need of love and healing.

Thy will, not *my will,* be done.

Now I understand that God's got a place for me in the band, too – just probably not playing tenor sax.

I don't yet know what or where that will be, long-term. I may wind up staying right here in Bethesda for a good long time. There are lots of creative ways for this all to work out.

Who knows?

With all my heart, I believe that God does. God, Whose generosity and love and abounding compassion cannot be outdone, has a purpose and plan for each one of us. God is supremely invested in the flourishing of *all* of God's Creation.

Not just in Randy. Not just in you. Not just in me. In *all* of us.

May God help us to see the bigger picture and hear the whole piece of music.

Thy will be done, Amen.