DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church

15
Nov

Enter the Joy

It Will Be Like This

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

Whom do you serve? This week's parable of the talents may not describe the kingdom of heaven, but expose the kingdom of this world - one that rewards production over people. As worship planners, we're left asking: does our liturgy invite people into that anxious economy, or into the joy of a God whose love isn't earned?

REFERENCES

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

COLORS

Green

Planning Worship

> *Artificial intelligence is shaping the lives of our congregations, and worship can make room for the questions it raises. Our companion guide, Keeping Awake, Awaiting Dawn, offers direction for addressing AI in worship during this season.*

Focus text: Matthew 25:14-30

Whom do you serve? Elsewhere in the book of Matthew, Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters…You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24). And then, we have this parable that portrays a master driven by wealth and productivity, a parable we often try to make fit the “kingdom of heaven,” because aren’t all of Jesus’ stories, especially in Matthew 25, about the kingdom of heaven? As Derek Weber proposes in the preaching notes, perhaps this is not a parable about the kingdom of heaven but the kingdom of this world, a story meant to tell us about the kingdom of heaven based on what it’s not. Now, I’ll stop there and let Derek get into the nitty-gritty of this interpretation of the parable of the talents. But this question, “Whom do you serve?” is a good question for us to ask as worship planners because, as we see in Matthew 25:23, whom we serve determines the joy we enter. As you prepare for worship this week, do you want to invite your people into the joy of the world or the joy of the kingdom of heaven, a joy dependent on wealth and productivity or on God’s love and grace?

As you prepare the liturgy for this Sunday, take stock of the prayers, call to worship, and rituals you will engage in as a community. Do they portray God as a master with high expectations or a loving parent who nurtures and enables us to live as disciples of Jesus Christ through love and grace? Are there undercurrents in the ways your church talks about and prays to God that resonate with the old adage (not found in the Bible): "God helps those who help themselves"? This is a wonderful Sunday, not just to demonstrate a different understanding of God’s kingdom, but to explain it. So often, we either assume everyone knows why we do what we do in worship or we assume that explaining what we’re doing in worship will be boring or take the meaning out of it. Maybe this is a good Sunday to preface the prayers of the people with a note about how we pray to a loving God who listens to all of us, who works for the good of all of us, and who does not play favorites or prioritize those who “prove” their faithfulness to God. You may think your congregants know this, but knowing it in our heads and knowing it in our bones are two different things.

Then, perhaps most importantly, find the joy--not the joy in material things or the joy that waits until we’re no longer stressed or anxious or fearful or tired, but the joy that meets us where we are and reminds us we are children of God, citizens of God’s kingdom. This is not joy we have to manufacture, but joy we create room for. Give people space to find some calm in worship. Acknowledge the difficult things we all carry right now. Tell stories of the good that is happening in your congregation, no matter how small it might seem. Show pictures of a senior-adult outing or of the children’s choir practicing. Invite everyone to have a two-minute dance party to shake it all out. Even simply turning to one another to say in worship, “I’m glad you’re here today,” may be one of the few positive interactions some of our congregants have all week. In a world that puts us in competition with one another and values us for our productivity, may church

be a place where we enter into the joy of belonging to God and to one another for no other reason than that we are all children of God.

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