While We Wait, We Care
Matthew 25:14–30
Hymn of the Day: O Christ, Our Hope (ELW 604)
Have you ever watched the TV show *America's Got Talent*?
People come on stage and show what they can do. Some can sing, some dance, some play instruments, and others have extraordinary abilities that leave the audience amazed.
And the judges decide who has talent and who doesn't.
When we hear the word *talent*, we usually think about our abilities, our gifts, and the things we are good at.
But I wonder: Could being prepared also be a talent?
Last Sunday, Kornelius preached about the ten bridesmaids. Five were prepared for the bridegroom's arrival, and five were not. Some had enough oil for their lamps; others did not.
The message was: Be prepared.
And today, we hear another parable from Jesus. Again, there is a time of waiting. Again, someone is going away and will return later.
But this time, the story is about talents.
And perhaps these two stories have more in common than we might think.
Actually, they are not just two stories that happen to follow each other. Matthew deliberately places them next to one another. And there is even a third story immediately following today's Gospel: the story of the sheep and the goats, where Jesus talks about caring for those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, or in need.
Three stories, one after another.
First, be prepared. Then, take responsibility for what has been entrusted to you. And finally, care for those who need you.
Perhaps Matthew wants us to understand that being prepared for Christ's coming is not simply about waiting. It is also about how we live while we wait.
But let's return to today's story.
When Jesus talks about talents, he is not talking about singing, dancing, or being good at something.
In biblical times, a talent was a unit of money, originally a measure of weight, usually referring to a large amount of silver.
And it was a LOT of money!
One talent was worth approximately 6,000 denarii. A denarius was roughly what an ordinary worker earned in a day. That means one talent represented about twenty years of wages.
If we tried to translate that into today's money, we would be talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on how we calculate today's wages.
So even the servant who received just one talent was entrusted with an enormous amount.
The master gives one servant five talents, another two, and another one. Then he leaves.
The first two servants take what they have received and put it to work. They trade with it and double the money.
But the third servant does something different. He digs a hole in the ground and buries his master's money.
Why?
Actually, burying money was a common way of keeping valuables safe in biblical times. There were no modern savings accounts. If you wanted to protect something valuable, hiding it in the ground was a recognized way of doing so.

And the servant explains his decision with one simple sentence: "I was afraid."
He was afraid of losing the money. Afraid of making a mistake. So he chose the safest possible option. He did nothing.
Interestingly, the master even points out that he could at least have deposited the money with the bankers, where it would have earned interest.
The servant had options. But fear kept him from doing anything with what had been entrusted to him.
And this brings us back to the word *talent*.
Over time, the meaning of this word developed. Today, we use it to describe the abilities and gifts a person has.
And perhaps that is not such a bad connection to make.
Because God has given each of us something. We all have different abilities, different gifts, and different opportunities.
Some people are good at listening. Others are good at organizing, teaching, building, creating, or encouraging people. Some have the gift of making others feel welcome. Some are particularly good at noticing when someone needs help.
We don't all receive the same gifts. Just as the servants in the story receive different amounts, we all have different abilities and possibilities.
But the important question is not whether we have five talents, two talents, or just one.
The question is: What do we do with what we have received?
Do we use our gifts? Do we share them? Or do we sometimes bury them because we are afraid, because we think they are not good enough, or because we assume someone else can do it better?
But I think there is an even bigger question here.
What if the talents God has entrusted to us are not only our individual abilities?
What if we also think about everything else that has been placed in our care?
Our families, our friends, our neighbors, our community. The people who need us, sometimes in ways we don't even notice.
And not just people. Think about the animals we care for, the pets that depend on us, and the whole creation around us.
When we take an animal into our home, we take responsibility for another living creature. It depends on us for food, safety, medical care, and affection.
And the same is true in many ways when it comes to our relationships with other people.
We cannot own another person. But we can care for one another. We can give our time, our attention, and our love.
Sometimes that means calling someone who has not been around for a while.
Visiting a neighbor. Listening to someone who is going through a difficult time.
Offering help without waiting to be asked.
Sometimes it is simply noticing that someone needs a little kindness.
And perhaps this is where the story of the third servant becomes especially relevant.
How often do we bury something that has been entrusted to us?
We see someone who needs help, but we think: I don't know what to say.
We notice someone is lonely, but we assume someone else will take care of it.
We have the opportunity to make a difference, but we are afraid that what we can offer is not enough.
And so we do nothing.
But we don't have to be able to do everything. We don't have to solve every problem or change the whole world.
We simply need to be willing to use what we have been given.

And there is something else about this story that I find important: trust.
The master trusts his servants. He gives them responsibility and freedom to decide what to do with what he has entrusted to them.
The first two servants seem to accept that trust. The third servant is guided by fear.
And perhaps that is a question for us, too:
Do we live out of trust, or do we live out of fear?
Do we trust that what God has given us is enough to make a difference? Do we trust that we can try, even if we are not perfect? Do we trust that we don't have to do everything alone?
Because we are not only people who are called to care for others. We are also people who need care ourselves.
We depend on one another. Sometimes we are the ones who help. Sometimes we are the ones who need help.
We are entrusted to one another.
And that is what community is about. That is what being the church is about.
And now, remember the third story in Matthew's chapter 25, the one that follows today's Gospel.
Jesus talks about the final judgment and describes how the Son of Man separates the sheep from the goats.
And what does he talk about?
Feeding the hungry. Giving drink to the thirsty. Welcoming the stranger. Clothing the naked. Caring for the sick. Visiting those in prison.
And then Jesus says something remarkable: Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.
Perhaps this is where all three stories come together.
Being prepared is not just about having enough oil in our lamps.
Using our talents is not just about making the most of our individual abilities.
And waiting for Christ is not about sitting back and doing nothing.
It is about living in a way that reflects God's love. It is about recognizing what we have received and sharing it with others.
Last Sunday, we heard: Be prepared.
Today, Jesus invites us to think about what we do with what has been entrusted to us.
And the story that follows reminds us that the way we treat others matters deeply.
Our hymn today is *O Christ, Our Hope*. And I think that is a beautiful connection.
Our hope is not in our own achievements or in how much we accomplish. Our hope is in Christ.
And because we live in that hope, we can share what we have received. We can take responsibility. We can care for one another.
God has entrusted us with so much. Our gifts, our time, our relationships, other living creatures, and this wonderful world we share.
We don't have to be perfect. We don't have to do everything. But we can notice. We can listen. We can help. We can care.
So perhaps the question Jesus leaves us with today is not simply: What are your talents?
But:
What has God entrusted to you? And what are you doing with it?
Because what has been entrusted to us is not simply something to keep or bury.
It is something to share. Something to use. Something to care for.
While we wait for Christ, we care for one another.
Amen.