

Weekly Update from Fr. John

Dear members and friends of our parish family,

I write to you this week with greetings from our brothers and sisters at St. Andrew & St. John where I preached and presided last Sunday. The day was a wonderful reminder of our unity together as the Body of Christ, and I received many good wishes and expressions of gratitude on behalf of COOF for our recent hosting of the Parish Partnership Joint Worship. On December 31, St. Andrew & St. John will return our hospitality in hosting the next partnership joint worship, and already I am looking forward to the fellowship and cheer that have so far been hallmarks of our shared ministry.

On this upcoming 24th Sunday after Pentecost we continue with Matthew's presentation of Jesus' discourse on the end times (Matthew 25:14-30). This week Jesus shares the Parable of the Talents, the third in a series of parables of judgment. The story is concerned with the responsible use of time and gifts as we await the coming of the Son of Man at an unknown time. As with the other parables this one functions as a spiritual allegory in which the sometimes difficult to grasp abstract truth of the end times is given concrete representation in story. As the story begins a man entrusts his property to slaves as he leaves on a journey. The amount of money given is measured in talents, which in the ancient world was actually a unit of weight, about 80 pounds, and when used to denote currency represented the value of an equivalent weight of silver. In this case, one talent would have represented about twenty years of wages for the average worker. In the absence of the master, the first two slaves double the amount given to them while the third buries his in the ground and upon the master's return is able only to return what had been given to him. The master is angered by this lack of return and banishes the slave for his failure to capitalize on the gift entrusted to him. The implication is that we are each entrusted with various gifts and called to use them properly as we await Jesus' return. Burying our gifts in the ground, protecting them from risk, serves only to protect ourselves and does nothing to enlarge God's Kingdom. This parable is often referenced in appeals to stewardship and is quite timely as we ourselves engage in our yearly stewardship campaign; that said, I invite you to consider the spiritual truth at the core of this teaching on a more personal level: what are the gifts entrusted to you by God? How do you seek to enlarge those gifts so that they may be offered back to the glory of God? These are important questions in our lives as disciples, questions I hope will remain with you beyond this season as we seek to deepen our discernment and live into the life to which God calls us.

Brad Berry will offer our stewardship talk this Sunday and continue to explore the many facets of stewardship as it relates to our sense of discipleship. I offer thanks to Chris Krenicki for what I'm told was a powerful witness to the importance of stewardship as personal devotion last Sunday. On a related note, I'm quite pleased with the responsiveness so many of you have shown in returning your 2018 pledge cards to the church. If you have not yet submitted a pledge card, please make every effort to return it to the church by November 26 so that our combined commitments to stewardship may be offered together on Christ the King Sunday. You may mail your pledge card or offer it in the Sunday plate in an envelope addressed to James Kitler, Treasurer.

Finally, looking ahead to Advent, I want to bring to your attention an opportunity for education and fellowship. In partnership with the other MDI parishes we will read together a short devotional by Barbara Crafton, entitled "Let Every Heart Prepare: Meditations for Advent and Christmas." This wonderful little book offers daily reflections for the season that use as their subject matter various hymns associated with the season. I will offer time on Sundays for group reflection and singing of hymns; on Wednesdays during Advent we will gather with our brothers and sisters from our partner parishes for extended discussion and singing. Copies of the book

will be available through the church office or you may order from Amazon as a book or for Kindle. More details will follow.

Faithfully,

John+