The Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28) **November 15, 2026**

"Good and Faithful Servant"

"Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21).

Today's first reading greets us with a shocking word of wrath. Zephaniah writes, "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near…At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.' Their goods shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them…A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zephaniah 1:7, 12-13, 15).

These words describe the judgment of a perfectly righteous God who will not tolerate or excuse sin. Here, we find a picture of punishment and destruction that would make the most shameless sinner squirm. The clear and plain meaning of this text is that complacency will not be tolerated, sin will be punished, and for those resting on their own merits, the day of the Lord will be one of suffering and regret. This theme is picked up again in the early verses of our epistle reading where Paul writes, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (I Thessalonians 5:2-3). Passages like these leave us dazed. They challenge our ideas about the grace of God and instead reveal a vigilant and all-powerful God who takes sin seriously and acts decisively. Here, our false assumptions about a benign and oblivious God are obliterated, and we see a vision of justice in which those who expected God to simply overlook sin will be tragically surprised.

Complacency is one of the greatest temptations we face, because it hits when things are going well. When we are comfortable, and life is going well, it's easy to take God's gifts for granted. And before long, we find ourselves simply going through the motions, content with what we have, and forgetting that everything we possess has been entrusted to us by the Lord. As we approach the 160th anniversary of our congregation and launch a renewed vision for ministry, this word is especially important for us to hear.

25 years ago, our congregation was facing some serious challenges. Finances were strained, our school was struggling, and there were real questions about the future of our ministry. In response, the leaders of Emmanuel began a planning process that created a blueprint for ministry that the Lord has blessed in ways we couldn't have imagined. Through the faithful giving of His people, God provided more than $14 million for the expansion of our campus, the restoration of our sanctuary, and the renovation of our school building. Even more importantly, God continued to work through this congregation to deliver His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation to countless people.

Now, as we prepare for the next chapter in Emmanuel's story, we face a different kind of call. Today, our finances are stable, and our ministry is growing. We are a healthy congregation. And yet, one of the greatest dangers for a healthy congregation is becoming comfortable. And that brings us back to the sobering words of Zephaniah. You see, the holiness of God is complete. The righteousness of God cannot be compromised. The justice of God must be realized, and the reality of our sin cannot be overlooked. The sobering and severe words of Zephaniah are not obsolete; they still apply to us today, and this should shake us out of our complacency.

Yet alongside these true and terrible words of judgment, we find another word from God, and it is even more shocking than His words of condemnation. You see, God dealt with our sin, but the way He did it is

utterly absurd to us. Instead of delivering the death and destruction we deserve, He sent His Son to take our place. And, in an unthinkable act of justice, God placed all the punishment and wrath that our sins deserve solely and completely on Christ. My friends, in the death of Jesus, the righteous requirements of Divine justice have been fully satisfied, and, on the Cross of Christ Jesus, the words of Zephaniah were realized as God's own Son experienced "a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness…" And He did all of this for us!

The Cross stands at the center of Scripture. It answers sin with grace, it balances the scales of justice, and it is the guarantee that our sins have been dealt with – that our shame has been taken away, and that no matter what you have done, or how horrible your secret sins may be, through the blood of Jesus Christ shed for you, today, you stand before God as righteous and holy as Christ Himself. As Paul writes in today's epistle, because of the Cross we are "are not in darkness, (but are) children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness…For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:4-5, 9). And when we grasp this gift of grace – when we realize that the price for our sin has already been paid, and that we have received full forgiveness and the promise of eternal life – then our view of the Master changes forever and we are compelled to action. We are liberated from the paralyzing fear of punishment and freed to live our lives for others, and this is exactly the change we see highlighted in today's gospel reading from Matthew 25.

In "The Parable of the Talents," Jesus gives a picture of what our lives look like as redeemed people. In this well-known parable, the Master entrusts his property to three servants, charging them to manage it well in his absence. To the first, He gives five talents, to the second He gives two, and to the third servant the Master gives one talent. Upon His return, the Master calls the servants in to give an account of their stewardship. After the first two servants reported on how they had multiplied the talents of the Master, He commends each of them, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" But when the third servant reports that, fearful of judgment, He had buried the Master's talent, the Master erupts, stripping the servant of the little he had and casting him into the outer darkness.

Jesus didn't tell this story to show a temperamental and unpredictable Master. He told this parable to highlight the stark contrast between a fear-driven existence and a faith-guided life, and what we see here informs us that a redeemed life is a life that risks for the Kingdom and responds to God's grace by using His gifts – not out of fear and uncertainty – but in the confidence of the Cross that we are loved by God, forgiven through Christ, and freed to use our talents for His saving purpose. That's one of the reasons we've spent the better part of this year listening, praying, and imagining together what the next chapter of Emmanuel's ministry might look like. And as The Story Continues, a simple truth has emerged: God has not blessed Emmanuel simply so that we can enjoy His blessings and rest from our labor. He has blessed us so that we can be a blessing to others.

Outside of Christ, we are paralyzed with fear. Outside of Christ, we are under judgment. Outside of Christ, we will face the fullness of God's justice. But in Christ Jesus, God's wrath has been satisfied, and we have been freed to serve – freed to use the talents God has given us and freed to be the good and faithful servants Christ died to create. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today, and all God's people say, "Amen."

Pastor Thomas A. Eggold