

# Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## THE GOSPEL TRADE

Matthew 25:14-30

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Bruce K Modahl

14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward,

saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'



From Canva

*"Those who trade with the gospel wind up with only more grace to share."*

## **Diagnosis: Called to Account**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Buried Treasure***

There is no one correct interpretation of a parable. Parables are stories laid alongside our lives. Parables, like the rest of the Bible, are thick with meaning, but porous with many points

of entry. Here is my take on the parable.

A talent was an enormous amount of wealth, beyond our imagination. Like the pearl of great price and the treasure hidden in the field, this extraordinary sum is used to indicate the value of the gospel. The master lavishes this fortune on his servants. Two of them went out and traded with it. They traded with the gospel. They were in the gospel trade.

The third servant dug a hole and buried it.

### ***Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Not Trusting the Product***

This third servant was not lazy. It would have taken a big hole to bury that much money. More likely it was a grave-size hole. He did not believe Jesus rose from the dead. Or he didn't believe it made any difference in his life. He didn't get in on the gospel trade. He did not believe in the product. He put it back in the ground, forgot about it, and went on with his life.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): The Day of Reckoning***

It turns out he dug himself into a hole. The day of reckoning came. The master returned to check on how the gospel trade was going. When he called for an accounting the third servant forfeited the gospel fortune that had been entrusted to him. It wasn't doing him or anyone else any good buried in the ground as it was.

We don't hear the final repercussion for this servant in the appointed text. We must read on to verse 30 where we hear the litany that is repeated at the end of many of Jesus' parables. The master called for him to be thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

# TAKING UP THE GOSPEL TRADE

**WE MAKE USE OF CHRIST'S BENEFITS**

**WE TAKE REVENGE IN TRADE FOR MERCY.**

FOR THE WRONGS WE DO TO OTHERS OR OTHERS DO  
TO US WE TAKE ALIENATION IN TRADE FOR THE HARD  
WORK OF RECONCILIATION.

WE TRADE KEEPING SCORE AND GETTING EVEN IN  
EXCHANGE FOR A REFUSAL TO ANSWER IN KIND.

RATHER, WE SEEK TO INTERPRET OUR NEIGHBOR'S  
ACTIONS IN  
THE BEST POSSIBLE LIGHT.

WE TRADE KEEPING SCORE AND  
GETTING EVEN IN EXCHANGE FOR  
A REFUSAL TO ANSWER IN KIND.

STINGY HEARTS AND NARROW LIVES  
WE COUNTER WITH GENEROSITY.



From Canva

## **Prognosis: Entrusted with Christ's Benefits**

***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Trading His Life  
for Our Death***

And in the outer darkness we witness the enormity of the  
gospel's worth. Jesus trusted God to the point of death. Jesus

joined the wicked servant in the outer darkness. Jesus bears his and our sins. He is buried in the grave we dig. On the third day God raised him to life. He trades his life for our death, his mercy for our sins, his trust in God for our mistrust. God promises that we too will be raised with Jesus.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Spirit Powered Faith***

The Holy Spirit uses the promise to work faith in our hearts, to engender love for God in which resides a proper fear of God, and to kindle trust so that daily we commend to God's hands our soul, body, and all that is ours. The gospel regenerates us, erases sin, trumps death, and multiplies itself.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Taking Up the Trade***

And then, as a matter of course, we take up the gospel trade. We make use of Christ's benefits. We take revenge in trade for mercy. For the wrongs we do to others or others do to us we take alienation in trade for the hard work of reconciliation. We trade keeping score and getting even in exchange for a refusal to answer in kind. Rather, we seek to interpret our neighbor's actions in the best possible light. Stingy hearts and narrow lives we counter with generosity.

You'd think such a trader would end up with a big warehouse full of sin, with revenge lining the basement shelves and paybacks stored in big bins in the attic. But such is the nature of God's economy that those who trade with the gospel wind up with only more grace to share.

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# Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

## God's Infinite Mercy Is Our Justice

Matthew 18:21-35

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Mark A Marius

*21Peter came and said to [Jesus], "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.*

*23"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you*



all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ 34And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”



(Right) The Unmerciful Servant/Just Judge – [From Wikimedia Commons](#)

(Left) Parable of the King and His Servants – Lawrence W. Ladd – [From Wikimedia Commons](#)

The cross was not just[-ified] for Jesus. But it was merciful for us. Jesus wasn't after something that was owed to him, but more concerned about restoring our relationship with God. His intercession for all our injustices is the mercy we get, not the justice we deserve.



## **Diagnosis: The Head Follows the Rues**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Head Not Heart***

Forgiveness. Do we have to? Let me get this straight in my head. What is the requirement? When someone does me wrong the sting and pain of injustice hurt my heart. The debt owed to me is burdensome. My thoughts of getting what I am owed produces anger within. Seven times is already more than the law requires.

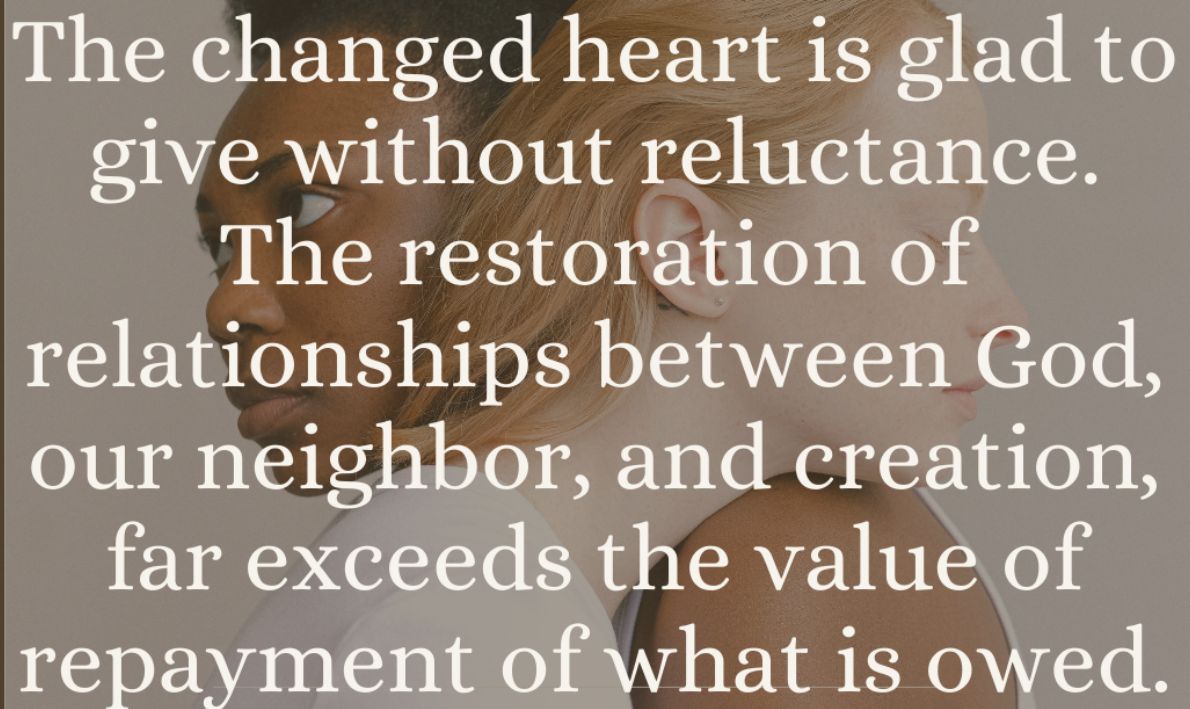
### ***Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Restitution Not Restoration***

Jesus speaks of mercy, but we want a justice that gives us what we are owed. We don't view the relationship as important as getting what was taken from us. We fail to trust that mercy will give us what we deserve—that the repaired relationship forgiveness brings is greater than what was taken from us. Isn't it our right to hold the other accountable?

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Justice Not Mercy***

Our seeking justice is a little short sighted. Getting what we are owed is a flawed system since we certainly cannot give to God what is owed to God—our creator and provider. But if that is how we wish to operate, should we expect God to operate differently? When God comes to collect do we want justice or mercy?

**The true forgiveness we give  
emanates from the heart...**



The changed heart is glad to  
give without reluctance.  
The restoration of  
relationships between God,  
our neighbor, and creation,  
far exceeds the value of  
repayment of what is owed.

*From Canva*

## **Prognosis: The Heart Breaks Open the Rules**

### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Mercy Is Justice***

The cross was not just for Jesus. But it was merciful for us. Jesus wasn't after something that was owed to him, but more concerned about restoring our relationship with God. His intercession for all our injustices is the mercy we get, not the justice we deserve. Thank God is willing to give us unlimited

mercy.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Restoration Is Restitution***

We can trust the mercy of God given to us through Jesus. With contrite hearts we seek forgiveness even though our head tells us we are undeserving. Our relationship with God is continually restored through the grace of the sacraments. Water, Bread, and Wine given freely without strings or expectation of repayment.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): The Heart Will Keep You Ahead***

The true forgiveness we give emanates from the heart. Our hearts, that God continually tends to, flows with unlimited love and grace. The heart cares less about meeting requirements, and relishes in surpassing expectations. The changed heart is glad to give without reluctance. The restoration of relationships between God, our neighbor, and creation, far exceeds the value of repayment of what is owed.

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## **Second Sunday after Pentecost**

### **We Use Requirements, Jesus Uses Mercy**

**Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26**

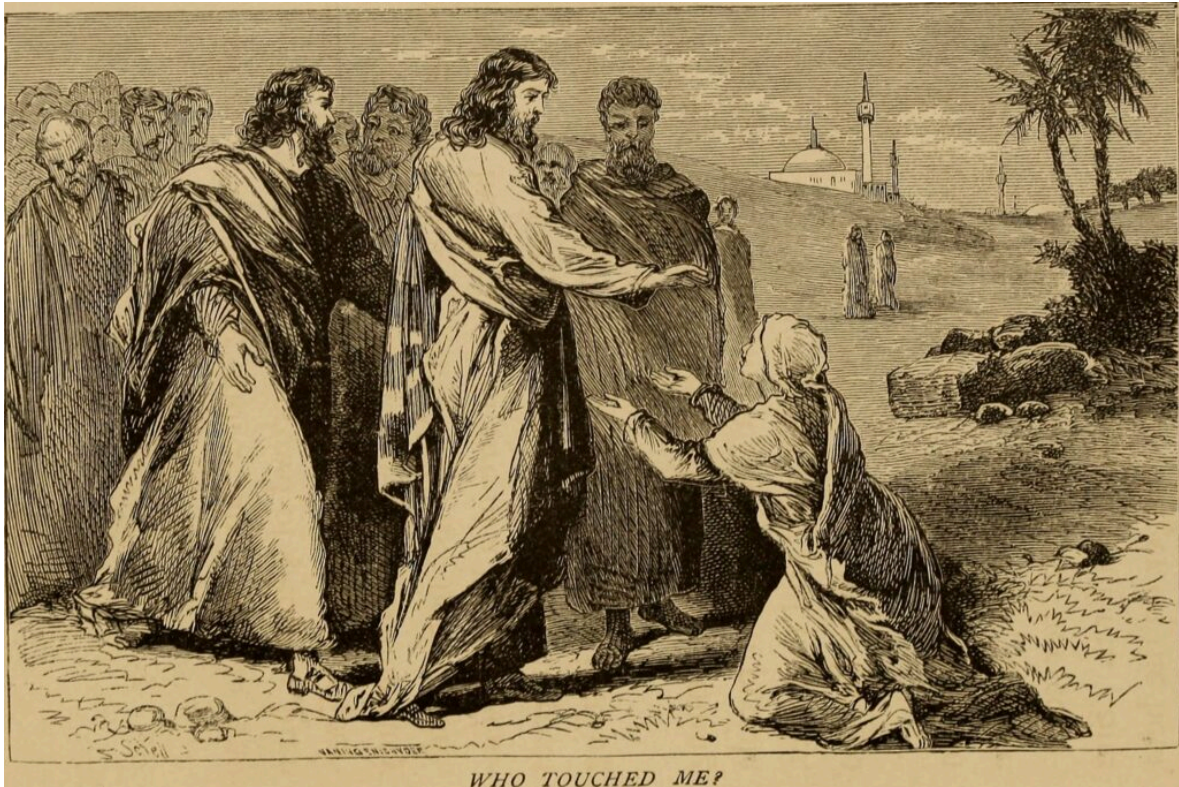
**Second Sunday after Pentecost**

**Analysis by Timothy Hoyer**

9As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. 10And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

18While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." 19And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. 20Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, 21for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." 22Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. 23When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, 24he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. 25But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26And the report of this spread throughout that district.





*Around the tea-table – Talmage, T. De Witt – from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>*

*Jesus is Jesus, not a list of requirements. He is God's mercy in human form, he is God's welcome with no entry fee, he is the doctor from God who cares for the sick, not those who are well.*

## **DIAGNOSIS: We Use Requirements**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): There Are Requirements***

Grounding: You are supposed to be good. And there are requirements used to determine if you are good. Thus, the Pharisees had the requirement that you could not be good if you are a tax collector. And there were a whole lot of other requirements they used to accuse lots of others as unwanted by God—in other words, sinners.

Tracking: We are supposed to be good. It's demanded of us no matter how we spend our days. Whatever we do has its list of

what is required of us to achieve that goodness—earn money, look well-dressed or look tough, have the right skin color, live in the right part of the city, show up on time, be self-sufficient, contribute to making others rich, belong to the correct political party, or have kids that excel at sports. The list goes on and on and on and on and on.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): We Like Requirements***

Grounding: That list of requirements is not just a list. It is a god in that it becomes the thing that we fear, love, and trust for our worth. That list is to be trusted, followed, adhered to. It is all that matters. So if your daughter dies, you have failed. If you are hemorrhaging, you have failed.

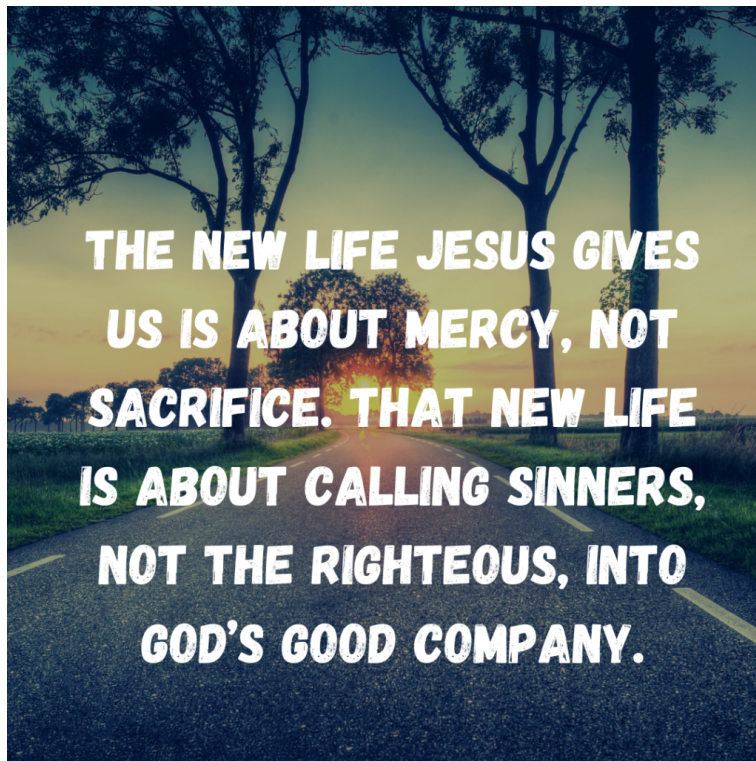
Tracking: That list of requirements is what makes us say, “We’re just following the rules.” It does not matter if the rules prevent help from being given or if following the rules hurts someone. “Sorry, we’re just following the rules.” The rules are obeyed, trusted, as if the rules are god. So if we can’t get help, if no one has time to help us, then we don’t matter. We have failed to meet the requirements. And everyone thinks that’s just fine. Everyone trusts the false promises that accompany the list of requirements.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Requirements Fail, We Fail***

Grounding: The Pharisees said that the requirements are God’s requirements. God made the list. God is making the demands. God judges. Death is God’s final verdict. Oddly, that verdict is for everyone, even those who seem to meet the requirements on the list. Maybe there is a requirement we have not noticed or have ignored, like “Love God most of all.”



Tracking: No matter how hard we try, daughters die, sons die, soldiers die, people die from drug overdoses, students and teachers are shot and killed, shoppers in malls are shot and killed. That list of requirements, even if mostly kept, does not keep us safe. It makes no sense. If God has not protected us, has God failed to meet our requirements or have we failed to meet God's requirements? Either way, it's a mess.



From — Canva

## **PROGNOSIS: Jesus Gives Us the Power of His Mercy**

***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus' Failure on a Cross Is Our "It's for Us!"***

Grounding: Jesus is Jesus, not a list of requirements. He is God's mercy in human form, he is God's welcome with no entry fee, he is the doctor from God who cares for the sick, not those who are well. The Pharisees condemn him for failing to fulfill the list of requirements, the very list they use to put him on a

cross. Yet God raised Jesus from the dead, revealing how God desires mercy, how God is for the sick, how God eats with tax collectors and sinners. The list of requirements to prove one's goodness is gone.

Crossing: As Jesus is risen, he promises to raise us to life with God. We die with him and now we live in him. Our new life in Jesus never ends. Who we are in Jesus never dies because we are in the risen Jesus who will never die again. We are safe in him.

***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Faith in Jesus Is Given—No Requirements***

Grounding: The woman who touched the fringe of Jesus' cloak was healed by Jesus because, as he said, "Take heart, daughter, your faith (in me) has made you well." And the faith of the father whose daughter had just died is also the reason Jesus said that she was not dead but sleeping; so he took her by the hand and she got up.

Crossing: Jesus' rising from the dead is his promise to give us life with God. He does this by forgiving our sin sickness. We, like the woman and the father, are made well before God by our faith in Jesus. Jesus eats with us, welcomes us, and is the physician who heals us from all the false promises we have trusted.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): We Have Mercy to Live By***

Grounding: The new life Jesus gives us is about mercy, not sacrifice. That new life is about calling sinners, not the righteous, into God's good company. Jesus, the skilled master of calling sinners, shows us how he does it. He eats with tax collectors and sinners, heals a woman, and he restores life to a

daughter.

Crossing: Having received mercy, we learn what it means to give mercy without having to offer our deeds as our sacrifices to God (as if paying God with our sacrifices earns us a good standing before God). We learn to give life to the outcast and sick without requiring payment of any kind—not money, not social status, and not obedience to rules. We learn how to forgive when we have been hurt. We learn how to promise Jesus' life to someone who is dying. We learn how to sit at table with those we disagree with. We learn that—since we are in Jesus—our place in life is safe and does not have to be gained by winning arguments, or being right, or declaring our country or neighborhood fit for only certain kinds of people. Mercy is now our guide for how we live with others.