

Proper 28A

Matthew 25:14-30

19 November 2017

Christ Church

In recent weeks, I've been watching for a second time, the television series, "West Wing." This program was first aired while I was in seminary. In fact, one of my supervisors scheduled his life around that Tuesday night program. As a seminarian, I didn't have that luxury.

It wasn't until Xfinity and my sabbatical that I finally got around to watching the show. It moved so quickly that I missed a lot, so I decided recently to watch it again. David and I have been astounded at the relevance of its content today. The issues which the show addresses are still the challenges that we face, both globally and at home. It is very informative.

One of the most poignant moments in the series comes toward the end of season six. The president, Josiah Bartlett, who had been diagnosed with MS, is beginning his eighth and final year as president. Although robust throughout most of his presidency, Bartlett is beginning to feel the effects of his disease. Likewise, some of the mistakes and impossible conundrums that go with our two-party system, has curbed his zeal for social change. He seems to be moving toward lame duck status.

His former chief-of-staff, Leo McGarrity, who has come back to the White House as a consultant after having a massive heart attack, sees his boss wavering and waffling uncharacteristically. So concerned is he by this trend, that he sets an appointment to speak to the president.

The two of them are close friends. They have served in the public sector for their entire career, Leo having served as a fighter pilot in Viet Nam. There is a depth in their relationship that happens when two people have struggled together through good times and bad.

Leo knows that his boss can be outspoken, intractable and volatile at times. He also knows that the president is passionate about the right things, has heart, and will eventually listen to what he has to say. Leo gently observes

aloud to his friend that the President is not himself. Leo tells Josiah that he is playing it safe – not making waves – keeping status quo to pave the way for his successor. Leo tells him that he has become complacent and comfortable and that he has quit working. Leo tells him that he still has a year left in office.

As Leo anticipates, the president becomes indignant. He says, “Leo, I have MS. I am tired. I am doing the best I can.” Leo says, “No you are not, sir.” A verbal battle ensues. But, eventually the president comes around and admits the truth of what his chief of staff is saying. There is a moment of sadness that lingers between these two veterans of public service, as they recognize the effects of their aging.

But, Leo is not content to leave the conversation that way. Leo looks intently into President Bartlett’s eyes and says, “I know you Mr. President. I know what you are made of. I know that you won’t be happy to wait idly for this last year to pass. I want us to play the whole game, Mr. President. Sir, I want us to leave all of it out on the field!”

“I want us to leave all of it out on the field.” Everything invested! All used to the max! And, isn’t that the message of today’s Gospel? There is a parable about the talents. Talents, by the way, are money, lots of money. We can read today’s scripture and surmise that the man who owned the slaves is a good capitalist. He is very impressed with the slave who invests his five talents and doubles their value. He is likewise pleased with the slave who doubles the value of his two talents. However, for the one who is afraid of his master and who hides his money for safe-keeping, things don’t go so well. He is condemned.

In the way that the writer of Matthew tells this story, Jesus uses the example of the land owner and his slaves to teach about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus wants his followers then, and us, his followers now, to make significant investment. Does he mean our money? Is he talking about our abilities? Our spiritual gifts? Yes, yes, and yes.

A wise friend once pointed out to me that we are systems of energy; and energy begets energy. Our money is a functional symbol of our energy. Our time is the vehicle by which we spend our energy. The question that Jesus is asking of us, I think, is “will we invest our energy in those things that really matter?”

Are we using our spiritual gifts and our energy for good? Does the way that we use our time and energy support the Gospel – what we believe – what we profess in our Baptism? The questions in our Baptismal covenant are a good tool of assessment:

- **Will you continue in the Apostles teaching, in breaking bread and in prayer?**
- **Will you resist evil and return to God when you sin?**
- **Will you proclaim by word and example God's good news?**
- **Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons?**
- **Will you strive for justice and peace?**

This is the energy; these are the spiritual gifts that really matter

In this fleeting life. Matthew's Gospel warns that the consequences of hoarding this energy are dire. Hoarding our energy is a miserable death to all that is good and right and holy.

So, the question for us is this, "Are we going to leave it all out on the field – expend every bit of the gift of life that God give us to bring about good in a world in sore need of it?"

The answer for President Bartlett is "Yes" He makes waves in Washington. There are new conversations and controversy which will lead to new ideas and new hope. It is not trouble free; it is lively. That is what God wants for us – to be lively – to give it everything we have – to leave all of it out on the field!