

Proper 28A  
November 16, 2008  
Baptism of Adrienne Grace Hillis

I feel it necessary to state, right at the beginning, that Jesus is *not* talking about investment strategies in today's Gospel! Right now, the mattress looks like a pretty good place for my retirement account, if I could only get it there. But Jesus is not talking about our money, although the talent he refers to is a unit of currency, and an improbably large one at that. A talent was worth roughly 30 years wages for a laborer! So incredibly large amounts of money are being tossed around in this parable. Remember that.

Secondly, a "talent" for us is some sort of special ability or competence, usually thought of as in-born, and hence often spoken of as a "gift". We tend to overvalue or undervalue our talents, and rarely do we correctly value them. The truth is that no matter how competent and able one may be, our abilities will not win our way into heaven. And no matter how insignificant we may deem ourselves, God has nonetheless endowed us with the gifts and charged us with the tasks that we alone can accomplish. But Jesus is not talking about such talents, either. However, gifts, generous gifts, are being offered in today's parable. Remember that.

For what Jesus is talking about today is the kingdom of heaven. God's beloved community. We tend to think of that kingdom, that community, as far, far away from us. In another time, another world. There is, of course, a certain truth in that. But it is not the whole story. What Jesus is talking about today is the way in which that community of grace takes root right here and right now through our attitude regarding life in this world. To put it as briefly as possible: will we live in fear, or will we live in hope?

I know that sounds like an oversimplification, but I don't think it is. The "one-talent servant" in the parable was fearful, and consequently he lived in a fearful world, under a fearful lord. We may well wonder at the source of his fear. Remember now what I mentioned earlier – the incredible generosity of the master of the house! But this servant did not see that generosity. Because he was a fearful man, he lived in a frightening and violent world, and met a frightening and violent end. But that was his choice.

Will we live in fear, or will we live in hope? Well before the time of most of us here today, a very wise man, speaking in the midst of a frightening situation said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." We need to remember that today, as well. I don't want you to think that I am trying to sugar-coat anything. We do indeed live in challenging and treacherous times. We do have to be careful and prudent. The news this week reported that racial epithets were found on walls and blackboards in local schools. That is fear at work in our world. When proposition 8 passed in California, that is fear at work in our world. Yes, we must be careful. But we also must remember that we have a choice as to whether we will feed the cycle of fear and violence or resist it.

And so what does hope look like? Our gospel this morning would tell us that it consists of a life of thanksgiving for an abundance of blessings even in the midst of apparent scarcity. The choice

between fear and hope is mirrored in our awareness of scarcity or abundance. Fearful people are often solitary people, cut off from the resources of community. Our hope lies not only in the generosity of God, but also in the resources each brings for the benefit of the community as a whole. Hope today looks like community. A community gathered to praise and worship God. A community united by love.

Hope today looks like little Adrienne Grace Hillis. Brought here today by her parents and godparents, to be offered to God and this community. They bring their greatest treasure, knowing that they will need God's grace and our help to keep this treasure safe and secure in a challenging and treacherous world. And so they will make solemn vows on her behalf, and we will pledge ourselves to them and her. Together we will guide and nurture her until the day when she will stand and take those vows for herself. I tell you right now: I intend to be here when that day arrives.

That is what hope looks like today. That is our strength to resist fear and violence. That is the gift, the treasure, we have been given to share with the world. "God is calling the Church of the Holy Apostles to live in our baptismal covenant" to be the hopeful prophets of a beautiful spring and an abundant harvest, even in the midst of winter.