

The Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Pentecost

November 16, 2008

Judges 4:1-7

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This morning's reading from Judges sort of leaves us hanging, doesn't it? I read it and thought, "Wow, let's see how God is going to smite Sisera and all his army." So, assuming that the story would continue, I looked at next week's Old Testament reading, and it won't be from Judges at all; it will be Ezekiel, and it's something about sheep.

This sent me straightway to read Judges, specifically Chapter 4, to finish the story. Have you read it? It's awful.

The short version is that there is a huge battle. God, through the army of Israel, triumphs over Sisera and his army of iron chariots, a real upset, and Israel's enemies are routed, and they all run away.

Apparently in the area of the great battle, a small tribe or family of nomads, Kenites, are camping. One of them, a woman named Jael, happens to look out the door of the tent and sees Sisera running for his life. She tells him, "Come in here and you will be safe." Jael tells lies. Once Sisera is inside, hiding under a rug, Jael dispatches him with a tent peg. I will spare you the details. Suffice it to say, so much for hospitality, compassion, and honesty.

Why, we may ask, is this story in the Bible? What has it to do with the Gospel reading about coins and servants? Having pondered that, I concluded that the connection has to do with opportunities. The question is, "What do we do with the opportunities God gives us?"

Appalling as it may seem God gave Jael an opportunity to strike a blow, literally, for the liberation of His people from oppression. Appalling as it may seem, she took it.

That's not unlike the good and faithful servant in the Gospel, the one who is given five talents and actually uses them to his master's benefit. The servant saw an opportunity to serve and benefit his master, and he made the best of it. He used what he had been given to do what he knew his master would wish to have done. Perhaps he took a risk at seizing that opportunity; nothing is accomplished if opportunities are not taken.

A story: A few weeks ago I came to the church on Saturday morning to set up for a Confirmation class. I suppose it was just before 8 a.m. On the walkway just outside the nursery windows was what appeared to be a pile of clothing, just lying there. I walked over and realized that it was two women sleeping under a pile of clothing. They woke up as I was standing there. The one on the left was Liz, probably in her early twenties, a runaway from a rehab center in Lake Park. The woman on the right was Darla, a much older wanderer, on her way south, weather-beaten. They had no idea where they were, but they said, "We saw the name Christ, and we knew we would be safe." Liz had only her clothing and book, a volume of the *World Book Encyclopedia*. Darla was equipped for the road with a backpack, a Bible, and a stuffed animal.

We could have said "On your way." We could have run them off to somewhere. We could have buried the opportunity to serve God by serving his poor lost sheep, but we didn't. We invited them to breakfast.

We found Liz's rehab center; they were relieved to learn that she was safe. They came for her. We hoped that Darla might go with her, but she was back the next day, Sunday morning, sleeping on the porch of Miller House. Perhaps you saw her that day; much of the parish did. Nobody took offense or fright at her presence; nobody told her to leave. On the contrary, people brought her breakfast and coffee, and lunch and blankets and a jacket; people listened to her story with respect and compassion, and, finally, people of Christ Church bought her ticket to her destination in Florida.

That is a real-life opportunity, a God-given opportunity to show the love and concern and compassion that every Christian is called to. We could have done nothing, burying that opportunity, and failed our Master, but Christ Church chose to use the opportunity.

I do believe God would say, "Well done, good and faithful servants."

In His Holy Name.