Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026
Zephaniah 1:7-16
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Matthew 25:14-20

How many of y'all have ever been to Hearst Castle? How many of y'all have ever been to the Taj Mahal? How many of y'all have ever been to Buckingham Palace? Those are the three most impressive homes that I could think of. Let's say that, tomorrow, whoever owns them gave them to you. Granted, the Taj Mahal was built for dead people (it's a mausoleum), but it would be an awesome place to live. Would you know how to handle Hearst Castle? Would you close the place down for a few months and invite all your friends and even your relatives to enjoy the place? Would you pump your favorite tunes into every room? Would you sleep in every bed, watch every sunset from the upper decks, and find all the cozy places to drink your coffee in the morning?

How many of you think that you could be a good steward of incredible wealth? If you were put in charge of the Louvre, would you do a good job. Let's say that, tomorrow, when you wake up, the President called your cell phone and said that he was putting you in charge of Fort Knox and that he'd check on you in a couple of years, how would you handle it? Admittedly, we're thinking big here, but not nearly big enough. What if the Lord Christ appeared in your family room tomorrow morning and said that He was giving you His death and resurrection and that He wanted you to do something with it, could you handle it? I give you my love, said the crucified Christ, and He reached into His heart, grabbed it, and then placed His Love into your soul. Take care of this, use it, give it away, reach out to others with it – I hereby make you my steward. Could you handle it? Are you up for it? Because that's exactly what He's done.

Jesus tells a parable about a super wealthy dude who entrusts his property, in the form of talents, to a few servants. A talent is both a weight measurement and a sum of money. One talent is equal to 20 years wages. The Monopoly Man in the parable then goes on a journey to Barbados and Tahiti and Figi and Bora Bora and Machu Pichu. And Mr. Money Bags comes back. And He wants to settle accounts. "Settling accounts" is a nice way of saying: "What did you do with my money?" The first two servants are elated to tell. Your cash has multiplied! It's amazing! The market loves your cash; the people are buying exactly what you're selling. Business is grrrreat! The wealthy guy is stoked, and he commends the two enterprising servants. But this parable has a dark side. The third servant is a bit of a downer. It's easy to get the impression that the third servant doesn't much like his master. "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours" (Matthew 25:24-25). Have a nice day.

This parable is not about some money man; it's not about a couple of lucky stiffs who pick the right Lotto numbers or about a disgruntled employee who thinks that his boss is an exploitative so and so. This parable is about Christ and His church. This is about the Lord of glory and *His* property. This is about what God has entrusted to you and the fact that He is going to return, and He will be very interested in how you've used what He's given to you. Settle accounts; the Lord

will return and He is going to settle accounts. There's no two ways about it. The Day is surely drawing near. It is remarkably irresponsible of you to behave in an empty-headed manner.

You're a steward. Here's what He's given you. Holiness – have you guarded it or have you profaned yourself by living in a sinful relationship, indulging in carnal acts that are contrary to God's will? God's property is the truth, and you've been given His resources. Have you engaged the world with the truth, or have you trafficked in lies, burying God's truth, covering it up with the dirt of deception? Love; God has invested His love in you, and you have been called upon to treat others the way that God has treated you. He wants a return on His investment. He knows what the Love that He has given to you will produce out there, in the world. Have you set it loose or have you buried it beneath the soil of selfish indulgence? Do you genuinely love? By that, I mean do you put others interests above your own? Do you honor those who God Himself loves by treating them with kindness and respect or do you slander your neighbor, speak tersely to your spouse, avoid serving others with the gifts that God has given you?

You ARE guilty. None of you have a spotless ledger of altruism. The trouble is not so much sin, which is bad enough. The trouble is ambivalence to the Giver, ambivalence to what He has given to you. You spend so much time thinking about material wealth that you miss the truly wonderful things in life. You are a steward of love and grace. You are a steward of forgiveness and humility. You can build up or you can tear down. And too often you don't even care, you don't notice and treasure what you've been given (Matthew 6:19-21). I'm guilty. Did you hear the word of judgment spoken upon the third servant? The Master will judge unbelief. He will judge those who presume to judge Him. You have the ability to spurn your Master. You have the ability to break His commandments without care. You have the ability to treat others harshly without any thought. Those who behave this way show themselves not just to be sinners but fools.

Nothing onerous is asked of you. Christ's yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). He promises to work in us to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13). What God demands, God provides. We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). We will not use these truths as fuel to walk through this life empty-headed. We rehearse the wonder of what we've been given, and we endeavor to show ourselves faithful, trustworthy, devout. I don't know when the Lord will return but I know that we are to live as though it is this afternoon. I know that others misjudge our Lord; and I also know that we will not. I am a servant, nothing more. The property belongs to Him, and I have been entrusted with treasures more than any castle or bank or stock market or museum could hold. I have a wife and she is a treasure. I have brothers and sisters in Christ and they are priceless. I have a bible. I have a church. I have the truth. God's property will generate a return – there's no doubt.

Heather and Craig are stewards of their daughter, Hannah June. That is a treasure beyond Fort Knox. And they brought her to be baptized! Well done, good and faithful servant! Hannah June belongs to God, and her parents have been entrusted by God with her. It's a beautiful picture, isn't it? The church has been entrusted with baptism. The church is a steward of the Law and the Gospel. The pastor is the steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). We are to put the things of God to work in the marketplace of our community; they will produce much fruit. We are stewards of Jesus' death and resurrection, stewards of unity in the faith, stewards of the

esprit de corps of our beloved congregation. Shall we not *strive* to prove ourselves faithful? What higher honor can God give you than to make you His steward, to invest in you His Son's death and resurrection?

Here's the Gospel irony: Christ is the talent. God buried His Son because He was looking for a return on His investment. Crucified and buried; Jesus takes that spot, your spot, because God the Father wants humanity returned. God was made man – that is the treasure; that was the investment. And the investment paid off. Sin couldn't hold Jesus. Death couldn't hold the Son of God. Satan couldn't stop the Messiah from redeeming humanity with His blood, from rising on Easter, and establishing His church on Pentecost. The Lord Christ has every intention of feeding you His body and blood and carrying you to heaven. Jesus is the steward. Jesus is the steward of life. He sacrificed His life on a cross and you are forgiven. That is stewardship. Grace surrounds you, love enriches you, and heaven is your home because Jesus is the good steward. What God demands, God provides.