Pentecost 25A - Comments/questions on the lessons for November 15, 2026

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

- Zephaniah writes in Judah during the reign of King Josiah. This places the prophecy some time before the Exile. In fact, Josiah will institute some major religious reforms during his reign to turn the country back to God, including reform of the Temple and its idolatrous practices. Could those actions have been taken in response to prophets like Zephaniah?
- The "Day of the Lord" for the prophets does not represent a final Judgment Day. Rather, it is when the nation will be brought to account for its behavior. Zephaniah describes what will happen if behavior does not change.
- When we encounter judgment passages, we ask what actions are being judged. We then ask how this challenges our behavior. In Zephaniah 1, we hear the following condemnations:
    - ***Idolatry – even from the priests:*** "I will cut off … the name of the idolatrous priests; … those who bow down and swear to the Lord, but also swear by Milcom [a god of the Ammonites]" (1:4-5)
    - ***Violence and injustice:*** "On that day I will punish all … who fill their master's house with violence and fraud." (1:9)
    - ***Complacency:*** "I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hears, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm.'" (1:12)
    - ***Reliance on wealth:*** "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath." (1:18)
- Zephaniah declares: "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath" (1:18). This seems to run contrary to the message within the gospel. How do you reconcile these two points of view?

Psalm 90:1-12

- This psalm is attributed to Moses, the only one of the psalms that is.
- As we said with Zephaniah, God's "wrath" or judgment is not seen as a final Judgment Day. Rather, the psalm reminds us that life is short and fragile. Wrath here is seen as something we live with every day. And there is no sin that is concealed before God. Thus, we are called to live our lives in faithfulness and wisdom.
- Though verses 9-12 are optional, the lectionary also leaves out the conclusion of the psalm, which further emphasizes how we are called to live:

13 Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!
14 Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
and for as many years as we have seen evil.
16 Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
17 Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

- It is ironic that these words have been used to scare people with the threat of judgment, when Paul meant them to "encourage one another and build up each other" (5:11). How can we use these words to encourage and build up, rather than to threaten and make others afraid?
- Though Paul definitely conceived of an imminent return of Jesus, his words about "the day of the Lord" may be understood about our deaths, for death will come to all of us "like a thief in the night." As with the Gospel last week, we are called to be ready.

Matthew 25:14-30

- We are used to thinking of the word "talent" here as symbolic of our own talents and gifts, but a talent actually represents an absurd amount of money – the equivalent of 15 years worth of labor. If we took the average median income in the United States, one talent would equal $750,000 (and two would be $1,500,000, and five would be $3,750,000)!! Does this change how you view the parable?
- What do you think of the reactions of the first two servants who immediately go out and make use of this abundance? What do you think of the reaction of the third servant?
- What would have happened if one of the servants had lost the money he had been given?
- How do you react to overwhelming generosity?