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Scripture notes – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A – 15th November 2026

There are times when it seems hard to see what connections were intended between the reading. Today gives us two views on men and women and in the patriarchal society of the Older Testament world, and then two warnings of how to live in end-times.

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

In Hebrew this is a poem, with each line beginning with succeeding letters of the alphabet. Translators do not try duplicate this form. The Bible was written in cultures which are centred on the viewpoint of males. These verses on women which close the book of Proverbs are not an exception, for it is a *man* describing the perfect wife. Nevertheless, what she is praised for is considerably more than a 'stay-at-home housewife and mother,' and that may give some inspiration to modern women. Looking at the whole poem – this is less than half – we see how her activities are commercial as well as providing for the household. She is busy at work in what would be considered 'careers' today. Especially important is her caring for the poor and needy, a frequent theme all throughout the Bible, something urged for both men and women.

Psalm 127*/128****:1-5***
This is a song in the Wisdom tradition and can be seen as complementing the poem of Proverbs, with a focus turned towards what a man is praised for and how he is rewarded with a fruitful wife and enough children to be compared to a branching tree. 'All people' however, seem included in the first 'blessed/happy'. The concluding blessing fits the type of psalm called 'Songs of Ascent' and are thought to be used by pilgrims 'ascending' to Jerusalem on feast days. The final words are the kind of blessing the pilgrims would hear from the priest when they entered the Temple. When we look at the ways a Bible passage may apply to us, those who 'revere' the Lord would hope to be 'happy all the days of our lives'.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
The reference to 'times and seasons' is to various writings of the turbulent time when St Paul wrote this Letter, to people who tried to predict the last day. Paul explains the Christians have been told the day is unknown and they should not be trying to figure that out, but living well in the times they have. The Day of the Lord' is an image from the Hebrew prophets, where it was a description of God coming as judge in the world and a warning to those who were oppressing others.

Christians took it over with the consolation that Jesus' return will be a time of joy for those faithful to him. Those choosing wars, violent crimes, all forms of oppression and causing pain will not have the last word – the promise is that all will be set right for those seeking love, and those who are suffering unjustly. Much of Paul's language is traditional, but his writing makes a vivid picture of the end coming without warning.

Sons of light/dark: Expressions with the phrase 'son of' are a feature of Semitic languages and we find quite a few of them in the New Testament, including Jesus' own designation of himself as 'The Son of Man'. Light and dark are frequent metaphors in many languages, more vivid for those who lived before artificial lighting and found dark hard to function in, often fearful, even dangerous. 'Sleeping' is an image of being unaware, even useless.

Gospel Acclamation
John 15:4-5: 'Make your home in me, as I make mine in you', says the

Lord. This gives us a greater spiritual, even mystical, depth to all the right ways to live that we find recommended in the other readings.

Matthew 25:14-30

Today we have another parable about Jesus returning and finding us as we are – for better and for worse.

This is one of many parables that can strike us in a very uncomfortable way, and feel 'unfair'; but also seems to compare God to a very undesirable type of person. This might be a sign that we are missing the point and making a different meaning from it – or it can be a sign that we are identifying with a particular character in the story!

The word often translated as 'talents' has nothing to do with gifts – it just sounds like the Greek word used, *talanton*, which is just a unit of money. So although it is tempting to soften the parable by understanding it as 'using our talents', that's not what the parable is literally talking about. The practice being described is one in which the master allocates a specific amount of money for his representative to use in trade. It is not a personal gift, ability, or endowment. It is something you aren't entitled to, but you've been given responsibility for.

Two people, entrusted with differing levels of responsibility, went to work with enthusiasm, made good use of what they had been entrusted with and increased it. One person decided it would be enough not to lose it, sat on his hands and did nothing.

Our 'Master' has given us the resources of the Kingdom of Heaven; the word of God, the message of the Gospel, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and much more. We can sit on them, take no risks, and hope just to hand it back and be praised for it when our Master returns. Or we can put them to work – into action – take risks – and hope to reap rewards for the common good.

In the context of the gospel sequence, just before this passage Matthew has several parables based on the need to be 'watchful' and 'patient' as the disciples wait for Jesus' promised return at the end of time. This parable then is a reminder that during the waiting period, disciples are not to be idle, but using what we have been given profitably – 'being faithful to God's instructions and acting on them with all the energy we

can muster, with all the abilities God has entrusted to us,' says John P. Meier. In so doing, we help to create the coming of the Dominion of Heaven. Next week's reading will pick up in more detail what Jesus expects of us.

If we take the parable as advice for using what God has gifted us with to care for others as well as ourselves, then we too are 'good and faithful servants' who enter into the joy of our Lord.

Joan Griffith/Gwen Griffith-Dickson

Suggestions for Prayer or Reflection:

- Leaving aside your own 'talents' – what have you been given or entrusted with by the Lord, that goes far beyond what you think of having in yourself?
- How can you use this for the common good?
- What are the fears and feelings of risk that might tempt you to play safe, 'bury' the riches given to you, and hope that's good enough?

Gwen Griffith-Dickson