

# Sermon Text for January 5, 2025

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

*II Kings 23:1-3*

*Matthew 25:14-30*

Normally we read the Scripture after we get a bit of a running start and kinda ease ourselves into the Second Scripture. But not today. Today is our 14<sup>th</sup> year of renewing our covenant together. Some of you have been here for all 14 of those, and for others of you, this is your first year. There are some Scriptures that we use consistently to remind ourselves of what it means to renew our relationship with God, to remind ourselves that it takes work and discipline to be a disciple and a follower of Jesus. It isn't something that we are born into.

We have never used this parable of the talents before to remind us of what it means to have a relationship with Jesus. This parable is used as an example of how we ought to use our gifts and our talents here on earth in order to be ready for the kingdom of God when it comes again. That is a good message, that is a great message, it could even be the moral behind the parable. We have other Scripture to back it up: I Peter 4:10, I Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 4:7. Brothers and sisters use the gifts that God has given you for the good of the church and for the good of this community through this church. That is a great message for us today, don't bury the gifts that God has given you and you have been equipped to do the work of God.

I've started reading books for 2025, one of you gave me one that is about what is called a tipping point, where a small number of people, about 25% are able to influence the groups tremendously, even change the culture of the rest of the 75% for good and for bad. We have a tendency to want to keep things to ourselves but as I mentioned in my enews I need 25% of you to start a movement in this church where you are taking it upon yourselves to invite family and friends who are not currently attending church anywhere to come here to First Presbyterian.

I strongly believe that if a small number of you take this up, and others around you see that there are folks worshipping with us whom we haven't seen before and we know that they have been invited by us, by the person sitting next to you, then that will motivate the rest of us to do the right thing which is to invite others into this fellowship.

This is really nothing more than a ceremony, a public display of piety. But like all ceremonies, think of a swearing in of a president, or a wedding, or any other public event, it doesn't find its worth in what we say or how we feel today, but rather it finds its worth in what

takes place after the words are spoken and the paper is signed. It is the covenant written upon our hearts by the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed upon the cross for all of our sins. But in order to live in this covenant in 2014 we have to first recognize that we are sinners. Look at me, all of you. We all deserve condemnation. We all deserve to die without the grace and love which is given to us by Jesus by his great sacrifice.

We are sinners in the hands of a loving God, but sinners we are.

We find ourselves once again on the first Sunday of a new year when we find ourselves face to face with the covenant renewal service. We gather ourselves like people have gathered for centuries now to renew their vows and to reaffirm a covenant that we have with our Savior Jesus Christ. If this is your first Sunday here and you do not know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, it may seem a bit out of place for you. Nobody is forced to make a vow with Jesus, although against our will and without any help from us he died on the cross and was raised again so that we could have salvation. We did not choose Jesus, he chose us. But today we gather to recognize that this past year we have not always chosen him, but He has remained faithful.

In 1775 John Wesley used this format for one of his services and credit goes to him for the content of this service. He in turn got the idea from a Puritan Richard Alleine 100 years earlier. Each year this service would be done during a New Year's Eve watchnight service. Wesley, who began the Methodist movement, found this service rich and meaningful as he expressed in his journal "Many mourned before God, and many were comforted.", and "It was, as usual, a time of remarkable blessing". Again in his diary he remarks "It was an occasion for a variety of spiritual experiences. I do not know that ever we had a greater blessing. Afterwards many desired to return thanks, either for a sense of pardon, for full salvation, or for a fresh manifestation of His graces, healing all their backsliding." As you can see this can be a powerful service if you let it be.

If you would take out the booklet which is in your bulletin. Notice that the heart of this service is found in the Covenant Prayer. This prayer requires persons to commit themselves to God. This covenant is serious and we must take it seriously. At the beginning of the prayer I will pause for a few moments to allow people to kneel if they so desire, or to bow your head in respect to the Almighty God and to the step which we are about to take together in this prayer. We will be held responsible for that in which we take part, good or bad. Approach this service with reverence, seriousness, and an open heart to God.

You will notice that each bulleting contains a copy of the covenant service. On the last page of the service you will find a space where you can put your signature and the date. I want

to encourage all of you to read through, pray through this service. If you feel that you are able to recommit or commit yourselves for the first time to the promises which are written in these pages then sign it, mark the date, and please call me or let me know that you have done that so that I can pray for you and so that we can talk about what is involved in this recommitment, or this commitment.

It is now the year 2025, we will be taking together the first Lord's Supper of the New Year. But even more importantly today in this service you will be given an opportunity to embrace the new life that Jesus has chosen for you. How fitting it is that we will be able to recommit our lives to Christ and then together take part in the sign of that new commitment in the Covenant of the Lord's Supper. We will also have represented an opportunity for you to remember your baptismal covenant by taking a blue bead from the font and take it home as a reminder of the covenant that you made today.

Let us now renew our promises before Almighty God.