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“Engage in trade with these until I return” (Luke 19:14).

Rev 4:1-11; Luke 19:11-28

Today’s Gospel from Luke repeats the story we read on Sunday from Matthew about a master giving money to his servants and then departing for a time. The details vary: Matthew has three servants who receive talents; Luke has 10 servants who each receive a single gold coin. This parable does not appear in Mark, the earliest of the Gospels, so its use has some importance for the later synoptics who wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem.

In Luke, Jesus tells this parable as he and his disciples are approaching Jerusalem for the final time before his crucifixion. A nobleman divides his wealth among his servants and then departs to confirm his kingship. Like Matthew’s, Luke’s story is about disciples making good use of their gifts until Jesus returns. Some servants trade and multiply their gold, but one hides it for fear of losing it, and he is harshly reprimanded.

Luke adds a detail about the king being rejected and later punishing his enemies, a possible allusion to an earlier crisis after the death of Herod in 4 CE when Archelaus, one of his four squabbling heirs, went off to Rome to ask to be appointed his successor. Luke’s focus is on Jesus, his departure in death and his promised return. The sharp edge to the parable reflects the early church’s effort to interpret the Jewish-Roman war in 70 CE and its apocalyptic aftermath as linked to the rejection of Jesus. We glimpse in these texts the first faith communities scrambling to gain their

footing within a difficult historical context.

They are not unlike us, also in our own historical moment, trying to understand how our faith helps us face the challenges of a deadly pandemic, global disarray, economic instability and a government threatened by both impulsiveness and paralysis. Today's parable instructs us to use our gifts to the full, trusting that whatever happens God will provide what we need to advance the Gospel.

Whether we experience a breakdown to our supposed normalcy or a blessed breakthrough to a more just and compassionate world for everyone, we, like our ancestors in every generation, will have to ride things out. We are not spectators but agents on the one planet we share with a single human family. History will judge us after the fact. One golden coin we have all received is hope to sustain us on the way. Now is the time to invest and multiply it.

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