

Sunday between November 13 and November 19

Prayer

God of courage and compassion,
you meet us when fear is loud,
when hope feels exposed,
and when responsibility has been placed in our hands.

Call us back from hiding.
Teach us to trust what you have entrusted to us,
not to prove ourselves or be admired,
but for the life of the world.

When people are treated as beneath others,
hold them in dignity.
When power threatens harm,
raise up voices of wisdom.
When your people are tempted to bury love,
give us courage to practise it.

Shape us as children of light:
steady in hope, generous in action,
and attentive to the needs of our neighbour.

What We Have Been Given

Some weeks ask what we do with what has been placed in our care. These readings hold together courage, vulnerability, responsibility, and readiness. They resist a faith that hides in fear or waits passively for someone else to act. God's way calls people into alert, generous, and truthful living: receiving dignity where people are shamed, encouraging one another when the world feels uncertain, and using what we have been given in ways that help life grow.

Threads to explore

- Courage in difficult times
- Dignity under pressure
- What has been entrusted to us
- Readiness as active love

Context

Judges 4 introduces Deborah, a prophet and judge, in a time when Israel is under threat. She summons Barak and tells him that God is calling him to gather people against Sisera, the commander of King Jabin's army. Psalm 123 is a short prayer for mercy from people who have had enough of being treated as beneath others. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul urges the church to live as children of light, encouraging and building one another up while they wait for God's future. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable about servants entrusted with money while their master is away. Two use what they are given; one buries it in fear.

Connections

These readings gather around what fear can do, and what trust can make possible. They speak to communities under pressure, people whose dignity has been worn down, and disciples trying to live faithfully while the future remains uncertain. The invitation is not to panic, perform, or prove our worth. It is to receive what has been entrusted to us and let it become encouragement, practical care, and shared responsibility. Faithfulness here is not passive waiting. It is love practised before the crisis, courage shared in hard places, and hope brought into the open.

Deepening the Word

Judges 4 brings Deborah into focus as a leader, prophet, and judge. In a time of oppression, she is the one who names God's call and summons Barak to action. Deborah is not a decorative figure or an exception to be explained away. She is central to the story's movement. Her leadership challenges any easy assumption that God's wisdom, authority, or courage belongs only to men. The passage also reminds us that faithful action often begins when someone names what is true and calls others to take responsibility.

This story needs careful handling. Judges is a violent book, shaped by conflict, threat, and cycles of oppression. It should not be used to glorify violence or suggest that God's people are called to seek harm. In worship and preaching, it may be more helpful to focus here on courage, shared responsibility, and the importance of listening to wise voices, especially voices that communities have too often ignored. In everyday life, this may take shape when people speak truth in unsafe systems, challenge harmful leadership, organise for safety, or help a community move from fear into faithful action.

Psalm 123 is brief but powerful. It gives language to the experience of being treated as beneath others: not only disliked, but treated as less worthy of dignity, attention, and care. Many people know something of this. It

can be felt when people are mocked for needing help, when their voices are dismissed, or when whole communities are treated as less worthy of protection. The psalm does not solve the harm. It cries for mercy. It gives language to those whose dignity has been attacked and trusts that God does not share the cruelty of the powerful.

Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians are about readiness, but not panic. The coming day is not offered as a timetable for speculation. Paul's concern is how the community lives now. They are children of light, not because they possess secret knowledge, but because they belong to Christ and are called to live with clarity, faith, love, and hope. The practical instruction is simple and communal: encourage one another and build each other up. Readiness is not anxiety. It is a shared life where people help each other remain faithful.

Matthew 25 can be difficult. The parable of the talents has often been turned into a lesson about productivity, investment, or making the most of personal gifts. That can be too simple and sometimes harmful, especially for people already under pressure to prove their worth. A talent was an enormous sum of money, and the story's world includes hierarchy, fear, and harsh judgement. We should not rush to make the master a straightforward image of God without recognising how troubling the language is. At the same time, the parable does ask a searching question: what happens when fear leads us to bury what has been entrusted to us?

The third servant is afraid, and his fear makes him hide the money away. Many people will recognise that pattern. Fear can make communities protect what they have instead of sharing it. It can make churches bury courage, silence difficult questions, or keep love safely out of reach. The parable asks whether waiting for God's future makes us cautious and closed, or whether it draws us into faithful risk for the sake of life. Read alongside Judges, Psalm 123 and 1 Thessalonians, it becomes a call to use what has been entrusted to us to protect dignity, encourage one another, and practise courage.

Be mindful that the parable of the talents can land painfully for people who have been valued only for achievement, productivity, confidence, or capacity. Offer the passage gently, making clear that worth is not measured by output. The invitation is not to prove ourselves, but to recognise what fear buries and to let love, courage, and care take practical shape.

Discussion

Matthew 25:14–30

This parable can be challenging, especially because it includes fear, money, hierarchy, and judgement. It is worth reading slowly and carefully. Rather than turning it into a simple message about achievement, we can ask what it reveals about fear, trust, and what communities do with what has been entrusted to them.

Questions:

- What feelings does this parable raise for you?
- Why might the third servant have buried what was entrusted to him?
- Where can fear make people or communities hide what could give life?
- How can we talk about what has been entrusted to us without making people feel valued only by productivity?
- What might faithful risk mean in a church or community?
- How do Paul's words about encouraging one another help shape our reading of this parable?

Call to Worship

Come as you are,
with courage or with fear.
Come with what you carry,
and what has been placed in your care.

God meets us with compassion.
Christ calls us into love.
The Spirit strengthens us
to build one another up.

Let us worship God.

Adoration

Compassionate God,
you are faithful when your people are afraid,
and tender when dignity has been wounded.

You raise up wisdom in unexpected places.
You call courage into speech.
You give strength for care
without turning love into a test.

You are near
when people are mocked or dismissed.
You are present
when responsibility feels heavy.
You are at work
when fear begins to loosen its grip.

You do not bury hope.
You do not shame the fearful.
You do not measure worth
by success, profit, or display.

We praise you,
 God of courage and compassion,
 for you entrust us with life,
 meet us with care,
 and call us to build up what gives life.

Confession

God of compassion,
 we confess that fear can make us small.

We bury what you have entrusted to us.
 We protect comfort when courage is needed.
 We keep quiet when our neighbour is shamed.
 We wait for others to act
 while love asks something of us.

Forgive us for the times
 our faith has been hidden away rather than lived.
 Free us from the need to prove our worth,
 and from the fear that keeps us from sharing what gives life.
 Teach us to receive your trust with humility
 and to practise care with courage.

Intercessions

Optional response

God of love,
give courage and hope.

We pray for people who are mocked, dismissed,
 or treated as though their lives matter less.
 Let dignity be protected,
 and let care reach people in practical ways.

We pray for communities facing fear and threat.
 Raise up wise voices,
 steady courage,
 and the care that protects life.

We pray for all who carry responsibility
 in difficult places and under pressure.
 Keep them humble when power tempts them,
 honest when truth is costly,
 and supported when the work feels lonely.

We pray for those whose fear has led them to hide.
 Meet them gently,
 and make room for courage to grow.

We pray for your church,
 entrusted with good news for the world.
 Keep us from burying good news beneath caution
 or hiding justice behind comfort.

Make us a community that encourages,
 builds up, and risks love for the sake of life.

Thanksgiving

God of generous trust,
 we give thanks for all that has been placed in our care.

For people who called us into courage,
 for those who protected dignity
 when others were being shamed,
 and for every act of care that made life more possible,
 we give thanks.

We thank you for Christ,
 whose love was not buried by fear,

and for the Spirit,
who keeps calling us into faithful action.

Receive our gratitude,
and let it become courage for the work before us.

Blessing

Receive courage for what has been entrusted to you.
Do not bury compassion.
Do not hide hope.

Let love become practice,
and let encouragement become part of your daily life.

Go in the dignity God gives,
the freedom Christ brings,
and the strength of the Spirit,
to build up what gives life.

Visual

- A buried coin or small bag under a clear bowl of soil, with a nearby candle or seedling, inviting reflection on what is hidden and what might be released for life. Describe the objects aloud where helpful.
- A simple noticeboard headed “What builds up?” where people can add, speak, draw, dictate, or choose words or images of encouragement, courage, care, truth, and shared responsibility.
- A chair with a cloth labelled “Deborah’s wisdom” and an open, accessible space beside it, symbolising leadership that calls others into courage rather than keeping power for itself. Speak or print the label clearly.

Creative

- **Entrusted Cards:** Give people small cards with the phrase “Something entrusted to us...” and invite them to write, draw, dictate, choose, or silently name a gift, responsibility, story, place, or relationship their community is called to tend.
- **Building Up Wall:** Invite people to write, draw, dictate, speak, or choose short messages of encouragement for the church, local community, or someone facing pressure.
- **Buried and Released:** Place stones in a bowl to represent fears that bury love. Invite people to move, touch, point to, or simply regard one stone, with another bowl labelled “courage” nearby, as a sign of choosing one faithful action.
- **Deborah’s Bench:** Create a discussion space, paired conversation, or individual reflection around wise leadership. Ask who has helped your community act with courage, especially people whose wisdom may previously have been ignored.
- **Words that Affirm:** Make simple cards with words or phrases for people who are often shamed or dismissed.
- **Faithful Risk Map:** Draw or describe a simple map of church or community life and invite people to write, draw, dictate, choose, or name places where one act of courage, welcome, or justice could help life grow.

Meditation

Based on Matthew 25:14–30

Something has been placed in your care.

Perhaps it does not feel significant.

Perhaps it does not feel impressive.

Perhaps you are not even sure
it counts as a gift.
But something has been entrusted to you.

A kindness.
A question.
A story.
A skill.
A place in a community.
A concern for justice.
A capacity to encourage.
A truth that needs gentle courage.

Pay attention to what rises in you.
Gratitude, perhaps.
Or fear.

Fear of getting it wrong.
Fear of being judged.
Fear of not being enough.
Fear that what you offer
will be compared with someone else.

In the parable, fear digs a hole.
Fear buries what was entrusted.
Fear keeps everything safe, untouched, unused.

Perhaps you know that place.
A word not spoken.
A gift not offered.
A kindness held back.
A challenge avoided.
A hope pushed down
because it felt safer not to try.

Do not rush past that fear.
Hold it honestly before God.

God is not asking you to perform.
 God is not asking you to prove your worth.
 God is not measuring your life
 by someone else's capacity.

But love does ask to be lived.
 Care asks to be practised.
 Hope asks for room.
 Justice asks for courage.
 Encouragement asks for a voice.

So ask gently:
 What have I buried
 that could give life?
 And what is one small way
 to bring it into the open?
 Not everything.
 Not perfectly.
 Not for applause.

One word.
 One act.
 One repair.
 One risk for love.

What has been entrusted to you
 does not have to be hidden forever.
 The God of compassion meets you in fear
 and calls courage into the open.

Performance

A short dramatic piece: "Buried"

Person 1: I kept it safe.

Person 2: Where?

Person 1: In the ground.

Person 2: That is one kind of safe.

Person 1: Nothing happened to it.

Person 2: Exactly.

Person 1: I thought that was the point.

Person 2: Was it?

Person 1: I was afraid.

Person 2: Of what?

Person 1: Getting it wrong.

Person 2: That is understandable.

Person 1: Being judged.

Person 2: Also understandable.

Person 1: Losing what was trusted to me.

Person 2: So you buried it.

Person 1: Yes.

Person 2: And did fear become smaller?

Person 1: No.

Person 2: Did the gift grow?

Person 1: No.

Person 2: Did anyone else receive anything from it?

Person 1: No.

Person 2: Then perhaps safe is not always the same as faithful.

Person 1: That sounds harsh.

Person 2: It can be gentle too.

Person 1: How?

Person 2: By asking what the fear was protecting.

Person 1: Me.

Person 2: From failure?

Person 1: Yes.

Person 2: From shame?

Person 1: Yes.

Person 2: From responsibility?

Person 1: Maybe.

Person 2: What was buried with it?

Person 1: A word I did not say. A kindness I delayed. A truth I avoided.

Person 2: Anything else?

Person 1: A bit of courage.

Person 2: Can it still be dug up?

Person 1: I do not know.

Person 2: Shall we start?

Person 1: With what?

Person 2: One handful of earth.

Practice

A practice of unburying courage

Choose one small thing this week that you may have kept hidden through fear. It might be a word of encouragement, an apology, a question, a creative idea, a practical offer, or a concern for justice.

Pause and ask: “What am I protecting, and what might love be asking?” Do not shame yourself for the fear. Let it tell you where gentleness is needed.

Then choose one small action that brings life into the open. Send the message, ask the question, share the idea, make the offer, raise the concern, or make one action towards repair.

Pray: “God of compassion, meet me in fear and grow courage in me.” At the end of the week, reflect on what changed when something buried was brought into the open.

Digital

- Post the question: “What helps courage grow when fear makes us hide?”
- Share a text-on-image line, with alt text or the same words in the caption: “Safe is not always the same as faithful.”
- Invite people to name one kind of encouragement that builds them up.
- Create a short reflection on Deborah as a leader whose wisdom calls others into courage.
- Ask: “What has been entrusted to our community for the sake of others?”

Explore

This week offers a way to talk with people new to faith about fear, courage, and responsibility. Many people know what it is to hide part of themselves because they are afraid of judgement or failure. These readings do not ask us to prove our worth. They invite us to trust that what has been placed in our care can be used for love. Faith becomes real when people act bravely, dignity is protected, and people encourage one another instead of leaving hope buried.

Discover

- Judges tells of Deborah, a prophet and judge, calling Barak to act in a time of danger.

- Psalm 123 is a prayer for mercy from people who have had enough of being treated as beneath others.
- 1 Thessalonians encourages believers to live as children of light and build one another up.
- Matthew tells a parable about servants entrusted with money while their master is away.
- Together, the readings ask what we do with responsibility, fear, courage, and trust.

Reflect

Faith is not about proving that we are useful or successful. These readings ask what happens when fear makes us hide what could give life. They also remind us that courage is often shared. Deborah calls Barak into action. Paul tells the community to encourage one another. The life of faith grows when people help each other practise care, protect dignity, and bring hope into the open.

Connect

You might recognise this in everyday life when someone finally speaks a truth, when a group stops avoiding a difficult issue, when a quiet gift is welcomed, or when a community chooses encouragement instead of shaming people. Small acts of courage can help love take shape.

Think

- What kind of fear most often makes people hide what could give life?
- How can a community make courage easier for one another?

Do

Choose one small act of encouragement this week. Tell someone what you value in them, make space for someone who is often pushed aside in conversation, support a person taking a careful risk, or name a gift in your community that has been hidden or undervalued. Keep it simple, but let it help courage grow.