25th Sunday after Pentecost / November 15th

First Illumination: Zephaniah (1:7,12-18)

Zephaniah prophesied in Judah during the reign of King Josiah, in the seventh century before Christ. Israel had long hoped for the Day of the Lord, the day God would set the world right in their favor. Zephaniah turns that hope toward the comfortable among God's own people. To "rest complacently on their dregs" is a picture of wine left sitting undisturbed, thick and still. Their creed is quiet and practical: God does nothing, neither good nor harm. Listen for that small creed, and for how loudly the prophet answers it.

Psalm Illumination: 90

Psalm 90 is the only psalm that carries the name of Moses, the man of God, and it opens the fourth book of the Psalter. It begins with where we live: "you have been our home in every generation," before it says a word about dust. Next to God's years, ours are like a few hours of the night. At its center the psalm asks for a skill rather than an escape: to count our days, so we can bring home a heart of wisdom. Listen for that asking, and for the last prayer: "Make it last."

Epistle Illumination: 1 Thessalonians (5:1-11)

First Thessalonians is probably the earliest letter of Paul that we have, written around the year 50 to a young church in Thessalonica, a busy port city in Macedonia, anxious about the coming of the Lord. Paul gives no timetable. He reminds them that they already know it comes like a thief, and then he gives them something to wear: faith and love as a breastplate, and for a helmet, hope. To be awake, here, is not to be afraid; it is to be ready, and busy with one another. Listen for hope, and for the work Paul says they are already doing.

Gospel Illumination: Matthew (25:14-30)

In Jesus' day a talent was not a skill but a sum of money, worth many years of a day laborer's wages. Even one talent was a fortune, and the servant given the least is still trusted with it. Our English use of "talent" for a gift or ability grew out of this very parable. Notice what the master does: he entrusts, he goes away, and he leaves the servants to decide what to do. Matthew places this story just before the great judgment of the nations. Listen for the third servant's reason, spoken in his own words: "I was afraid."

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