

“The Last Supper: Conversations that Led to the Cross” By Dr. Will Willimon

Session 5: Refusing the Host
March 22, 2026 4:00 PM

Thank you for joining us again for this Lenten journey with Jesus. As we approach Holy Week in our journey with Jesus, the parables help prepare us for the violence and rejection that awaits.

INTRODUCTION

- What’s the difference between being “careful” and being “fearful” when it comes to faith?
- When have you played it too safe in your Christian life? When have you taken faithful risks?

We sympathize with the one-mina guy because most of us are not multitalented. Neither are most churches I’ve served. - Willimon

- How do you respond to Willimon’s honest assessment of limited talents?
- What does it mean to be faithful stewards when we don’t feel particularly gifted?

OPENING PRAYER

God of generous gifts and high expectations, you entrust us with more than we think we can handle and expect more than we think we can give. As we explore these difficult parables today, help us distinguish between faithful caution and fearful timidity. Give us courage to unwrap the gifts you’ve given us and wisdom to risk them for your kingdom. Prepare our hearts for the hard truths about our own resistance to your authority. Amen.

SESSION 5 VIDEO – “The Buried Talent”

Thoughts to consider as we watch the video...

- How does Willimon’s interpretation of the “harsh king” versus God’s character affect your understanding of the Minas parable?
- What struck you about his analysis of our tendency to bury God’s gifts?

THE PARABLE OF THE BURIED GIFT

Scripture Focus – Luke 19:11-27

The King’s Harshness...

Unlike many other parables, we must not too quickly assume that this king is God the Father or Jesus the Son. The words “bring them here and slaughter them in front of me” wouldn’t fit in Jesus’s mouth. - Willimon

- How does recognizing this as a critique of worldly kingship change the parable’s meaning?
- What does this story tell us about how earthly power operates versus God’s kingdom?

The One-Mina Servant

Our sympathies lie with the servant who receives one mina who does what is prudent, responsible, careful, and secure, what any reasonable person would do, that is, what any of us would do?

Servant’s Defense – “I was afraid of you because you are a stern man.”

- How does fear prevent faithful risk-taking?
- When has a fear of failure kept you from using your gifts?
- What’s the difference between calling God “stern” and recognizing God’s expectations?

The Real King

The king has not taken anything from anybody. On the contrary, he has recklessly given a bunch of money to his servants, sowing among them a huge amount of cash without being asked by them to do so. – Willimon

- How is God's generosity different from the harsh king's expectations?
- What does it mean that God "sows" gifts among us without being asked?
- How do we confuse God's expectations with worldly demands for performance?

LOVE AS OUR ONE GIFT

All we've been given is one little mina, I mean, gift: love. Repeatedly Jesus stressed, Love one another...Love yourself; love your neighbor...Love your enemies, even... Then he left town. What will we have to show for ourselves when there's an accounting? - Willimon

- How does reducing our "assignment" to love simplify faithful living?
- When has FBC Elon chosen to "err on the side of love"?
- What would it look like to invest love recklessly rather than bury it safely?

THE VIOLENCE OF REFUSAL

Scripture Focus – Luke 20:9-19 – The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

God's Vineyard

In that time period, everyone knew "vineyard" meant Israel, and the owner's repeated sending of servants represented God's long history with the people.

- How does knowing this is about God's relationship with Israel change your reading?
- What does the escalating violence against the servants tell us about human resistance to God?

The Beloved Son

Vs 13: “I’ll send my son, whom I love dearly. Perhaps they will respect him.”

The parable does not say that the owner of the vineyard actually destroyed the tenants just as the renters murdered the son. The parable says only what – if there’s an ounce of justice in this world – should happen. - Willimon

- Why does the owner keep sending representatives despite the violence?
- What does sending the beloved son reveal about God’s character?
- How do we act like “wicked tenants” who treat God’s world as our possession?

THE MODERN VINEYARD

We thought we were so smart, despoiling creation as if it were ours, mining, building, developing, and using and abusing the world as we please. We’ve got the whole world in our hands. – Willimon

- How do we act as if the church belongs to us rather than God?
- When has FBC Elon had to choose between comfort and faithfulness?
- What does it mean that “God isn’t kind to a disobedient church”?

THE OWNER’S RESPONSE

Crucial Question - What will the owner of the vineyard do to them?

What’s the Father’s response to the long history of refusal and sometimes even violent rejection that God and God’s prophets have received from the temporary inhabitants of God’s vineyard? Send the beloved Son. – Willimon

- How does God’s response to rejection differ from what we might expect?
- What does it mean that Jesus tells this story knowing he’s heading toward his own rejection?
- How does the cross represent both judgment and grace?

HOPE IN THE OWNER'S PERSISTENCE

The Son, come to Jerusalem to collect God's dues, shall, after supper in an upper room, indeed be betrayed with a kiss, beaten, cast out of the city, and murdered by a bunch of temporary tenants who act as if the Holy City belongs to them. – Willimon

At the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, he shall promise – even to those who have routinely misunderstood, disobeyed, and refused – the undeserved gift of God's kingdom. - Willimon

- How does knowing the end of the story change how we read these violent parables?
- What hope do we find in God's refusal to be refused?
- How does the Last Supper represent the owner's ultimate response?

CLOSING

Unwrapping Your Gifts

Willimon reminds us that most of us aren't multitalented, but we've all been given something. These wrapped gifts represent the talents, resources, and opportunities God has entrusted to us.

- What gifts has God given you that you might be "burying" out of fear or caution?
- What would it look like to "unwrap" and risk those gifts for God's kingdom this week?
- How might God be calling you to be less of a "temporary tenant" and more of a faithful steward?

Unwrap your gift as a symbol of commitment to stop burying what God has given you...

- How have you experienced the dogged determination of Christ to connect with you in spite of your efforts to evade him?
- Take an honest look at FBC Elon. How have we been ungrateful tenants of God's vineyard?

CLOSING PRAYER

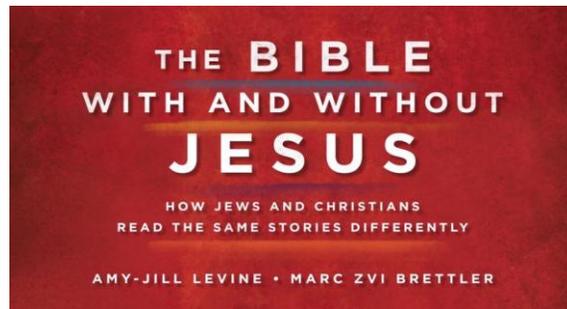
Persistent God, you keep sending your messengers even when we refuse to listen, keep offering your gifts even when we bury them in fear. Forgive us for acting like owners rather than tenants, for treating your vineyard as our possession. Help us unwrap the gifts you’ve given us and invest them boldly in your kingdom. As we approach the cross with Jesus, remind us that your love refuses to be refused, and your grace persists even through our rebellion. Make us faithful stewards of all you’ve entrusted to us. Amen.

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Session 6: The Host Who Becomes the Meal

Sunday, March 29 4:00 PM

NEW SPRING STUDY



Esteemed Bible scholars and teachers Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler take readers on a guided tour of the most popular Hebrew Bible passages quoted in the New Testament to show what the texts meant in their original contexts and then how Jews and Christians, over time, understood those same texts. Passages include: the creation of the world, the role of Adam and Eve, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, the book of Jonah, and Psalm 22, whose words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” Jesus quotes as he dies on the cross.

Comparing various interpretations – historical, literary, and theological - of each ancient text, Levine and Brettler offer deeper understandings of the original narratives and their many afterlives. They show how the text speaks to different generations under changed circumstances, and so illuminate the Bible’s ongoing significance. By understanding the depth and variety by which these passages have been, and can be, understood, *The Bible With and Without Jesus* does more than enhance our religious understandings, it helps us to see the Bible as a source of inspiration for any and all readers.

STUDY BEGINS SUNDAY, APRIL 12.