

## **The Parable of the Talents**

### **Matthew 25:14-15,19-29**

Jesus said, "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'"

### **Sermon**

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us a parable about how to respond to God's gifts. We are encouraged to invest whatever we are given. When we use our skills and talents, our money and wealth as God directs us, we receive a share in God's joy.

We talk a lot at this time of year about giving thanks for what God has given us. I believe that everything we have, and everything we are is given to us by God. This is a claim that is at the heart of today's parable too. It is a claim that we sometimes take for granted, and our actions don't always support it. It is hard to get our egos out of the way and humbly accept that everything we have, and everything we are, comes from God. Our lives, our work, our skills and talents, not to mention all that we have accomplished using these gifts, they all come from God. That's what Jesus is reminding us through this parable.

Jesus uses parables to teach us because it is hard to convey in human terms how it is that God operates. The parable allows for layers of understanding. Each time we hear these parables, we may hear different things.

This parable talks about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is asking us to look at how things are different in God's Kingdom. We are asked to think beyond our own experiences and try to see things as God sees them.

The Kingdom of heaven is - as if the master of a household is going away on a journey, and so he designates three servants to care for his talents - his wealth. A talent, in this context is actually an amount of money - a fairly large amount of money - in today's terms it might be a quarter of a million dollars. But it doesn't hurt the meaning of the parable to think of talents more broadly. Talents could be thought of as anything that

God has entrusted to our care – our families, this church, a skill or a gift or special ability, the things that make each of us unique.

In the parable the master – God – entrusts valuable property to the servants – us – but only for a time, and when the Master returns the servants will be held accountable for their actions. It is an important responsibility to be entrusted with God's property. Two of the servants rise to the occasion, but the other one is struck with fear. The fearful servant thinks the master is a harsh man. He reaps where he didn't sow, and gathers where he didn't scatter seed. The fearful servant hides his talent, buries it in the ground, he thinks he is playing it safe.

One might hear this parable as a description of how people respond to the gifts God gives. We might have been sitting here listening to the reading, and thinking to ourselves, am I like the slaves who take the money and wisely invest it, or am I more like the one who buries it away out of fear?

This is a good way to listen to parables. If we recognize aspects of ourselves in one of the characters, we have an opportunity to learn something. If we are willing to look honestly at ourselves we might be surprised to find that we may not invest our gifts as God desires. We might be afraid to lose what we have, or we might be stuck in a way of thinking about our talents that keeps us from what we are truly intended to do. If this is true, our challenge becomes to turn that around, give up our fear, and be open to using our gifts in a new way. What we do with the gifts God entrusts to us is important. And there are many ways to use our gifts in service to God.

So... first we need to be aware of our gifts. Many times our gifts are self-evident. Many times we discover a talent by accident. We might find at an early age that we are good at sports, or like to read and write. For me I learned very early that I liked to sing. By the time I was in high school I enjoyed singing and performing so much that I decided to pursue it as a career. Many people helped me nurture and develop my musical gifts and I eventually studied music in college. I worked professionally and had a decent career. But... when I quit singing professionally, so I could be with my family more, I thought I'd probably not find that joy in singing again.

This is real fear, a fear we here about in the parable. God gives us gifts and wants us to use them. And as the parable says if you don't use them you may lose them. This is certainly true for musicians. If you don't continue to practice and work on your instrument, you quickly become rusty.

I'm glad to say that I found a new place to use my musical gifts and I found more joy in singing than I had ever had before. It wasn't where I expected, in a theater or on a concert stage; it was singing lullabies to my children, and it was singing hymns with the church choir. I learned from this experience that there are lots of satisfying ways to use our gifts, not only in the workplace.

God wants us to use the gifts we have been given. And when we do, we enter into God's joy. We are told that the servants in the parable who invested their talents enter into the joy of the master. We know when we are using God's gifts appropriately because we feel joy. It gives us life and energy. We also hear that when we aren't using God's gifts appropriately we may feel darkness and sorrow.

I'm sure you've been in situations, either at work or in a volunteer capacity, where you just haven't been able to use your talents effectively. Perhaps others haven't recognized your gifts, or perhaps you felt unprepared for what was asked of you. That frustration, that sorrow we feel, when we think our talents are being squandered, or taken for granted is what leads us to consider hiding our talents. This is the very thing we are being challenged to change.

I think it's important to notice that we are told that each of the servants is given according to his ability. God doesn't just divide things up evenly, God gives to each according to their ability. Now, I find that reassuring. God doesn't entrust gifts to us that we can't use, and it means that we can risk investing these gifts because God is supporting us. We may end up using our gifts in a way that we didn't expect, but that's OK.

And isn't it interesting that in this parable the two servants who invest their talents succeed. We don't hear about a servant who risks his talent and losses it. What does that tell us? In fact we hear the opposite, the one who doesn't take the risk and invest the talent wisely, losses it. Like I said before... use it or lose it.

Finally we hear at the end of the parable that "for to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance." We will have an abundance if we use the talents God gives us. We may not have everything we always wanted, I never landed that big Broadway Musical, but we will have an abundance. We will have enough. Enough to satisfy our needs and enough to live our lives as God intends.

We are often confronted with the choice --- risk investing what God has given, or play it safe and bury our talent in the ground. Investing brings a share in Gods joy, playing it safe could bring fear and darkness. Please remember God gives to us according to our ability. Trust God, take the risk, and share in God's joy. AMEN!