

Proper 28 Sermon November 13, 2011 Five Talent Matt 25: 14-30

If I were in the habit of putting titles on my sermons, this one would be called "Out of Fear I Buried It"

Today's Gospel seems as if it has a fairly straight forward message. Don't hide your gifts-your talents. And, of course, it is a wonderful stewardship message. To sum it up: three servants are entrusted with valuable sums of money-talents. Each one is given an amount that is equal to his abilities-five, two and one. The first invests all he has and yields another five. The one who has been given two talents doubles his money. The third, the fearful one, digs a hole in the ground and buries it. When the master returns, he rewards those who increase their talents, and says "come, share your master's joy."

Not so for the third servant. He gives the back to his master saying: "I knew you to be a hard man, so out of fear I went off and buried the money in the ground. Here is your money back." After the money is gifted to the first two servants, the third is called a worthless lout and is thrown out into the dark to grind his teeth with the master's reproach: "Those who have will get more until they grow rich while those who have not will lose even the little they have."

This is not a description of God's unfairness. It is not a description of what ought to be. It's a description of what is -- those who have more multiply their wealth much more easily than do those in the grip of poverty. Poor people have a hard

time with risk: they live in an all-or-nothing world that little resembles the cushioned reality of those with more money. Reverses of fortune will come to everyone, but they will not be fatal to everyone. A rich entrepreneur may lose a larger amount in a risky endeavor gone bad, but the smaller amount a poor one loses may be all there is.

Friends, this is NOT a parable about capitalism, this is a story about the end times, our lives, our very being, our very judgment from our very own Master, our God. As we approach the end of this liturgical season we hear yet another warning to “get our house in order.” Again we hear Matthew’s words of darkness and grinding of teeth as a warning to us about sin-being lost, feeling anxious. We are hearing again and again from this Gospel not to waste the precious time we have here on this side of God’s eternity. We should not waste the precious gifts that we have been given-that we *all* have been given. And yes, it is also just fine to be financially rich, as long as your finances are used to further God’s kingdom, not just to pad the lining of your pockets. We all have talents, and part of what good stewardship means is to discern just what our individual talents are, and how it is best to use them.

Misfortune makes us fear more misfortune. Instinctively, we contract. In every arena of human experience, the same: unlucky in love, we refuse to love

again, and doom ourselves to a life of loneliness. Unemployed and unrewarded in the search for work, we yield to our discouragement and stop looking. Unable to control our eating, our drinking, our gambling, our shopping -- we give up, turning our fate over to the demon of addiction who desires our death. Unable to endure our physical pain, we refuse the therapy that will help to vanquish it. It's no use, we tell ourselves bitterly, and this feels like common sense.

This is not sin. It is just the way we are. It's just our weakness -- fear guts us. Boldness is in short supply when we've been hollowed out by brutal history, whether by our own hand or another's. A power greater than our own is needed when we can't seem to do anything but curl up in a ball and wait for the end, and the courage needed to call on that power is huge. Whatever our talents are, whatever has been given to us, whether it be money, talent, opportunity- whatever is given to us is meant to bear for the kingdom, for the glory of God and for the salvation of our souls.

The parable following this one makes clear that the entire judgment of history and of each other is based upon our service to the least of our brothers and our sisters. (That is where we ask God "when did you see us?" and God answers that we are seen in the ways that we have treated the needy people whom we have encountered.)

In the most fundamental sense, this parable of the talents represents the bounty of life itself, as well as the pre-eminent gift of faith. If we are fortunate to reach the maturing required for personal responsibility and to have the opportunity to use the talents of life and faith that we each have been given, it is incumbent upon us to invest our gifts, not to bury them out of fear or laziness<sup>1</sup> This parable is not about the financial markets, it is about how we use all of our God-given gifts.

Believe me; I have my own stories about circumstances when I was afraid to part with my money, or my time, in order to help other people. I have had to practice what I preach, and, at times, it has been so not easy! But there has not been one time when I have regretted letting go of my fear.

And I do think that for many of us it is fear, and not greed that holds our generosity hostage. As we mature, we seem to care less about material objects and more about overall security. Faith, however, is not faith in material security. Faith is about the trust we have that God takes care of us, blessing us by the joy we experience by being children of God's light and children of God's day. So let us

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<sup>1</sup> Kavanaugh, John F. The Word Embodied. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1998.

belong to God's day, putting on the breastplate of faith of love, and the helmet of hope and salvation<sup>2</sup>

The trustworthiness of the profitable servants ensures their share in the joy of the Lord, not because they increased their financial wealth, but because they invested the wealth of life and the talent given to them to bear fruit in their labors of faith, hope and charity. So grow while you can. Risk whenever you can bring yourself to do so. Be bold, even when everything in you trembles with fear at your own boldness. Commit to growing, for if you do not, you will surely shrink.<sup>3</sup>

Let us each come, and share in our Master's joy.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

<sup>3</sup> Crafton, Barbara. The Daily Mo.