

Matthew 25:14-30

Do you know what every associate pastor  
wants to preach on,  
the Sunday after the senior pastor  
has done the Stewardship sermon?  
The parable of the talents.  
That's a joke for those of you at home  
...which is everyone this week.

At first glance when it comes to talents,  
we think yes, *we get it*,  
we need to use our *talents wisely*,  
which of course means  
we need to use *our money wisely*.

And kudos to the Stewardship com. and volunteers  
It was a great program this year—  
and we're so techy  
that we've got a stewardship card online!  
So, act now—just call 1-800-257-1234  
and if you call within the next 10 minutes...

But you know, there are things I'd just prefer not to preach on.  
I have never really liked parable of the talents.  
The master seems so harsh.  
Like why it is a bad idea  
to bury that one talent?

It was as common back then,  
as it is now...  
to take care of,  
to make sure,  
that your money is safe.

Remember the parable you told, Jesus,  
like ten chapters ago in Matthew,  
about the treasure ***hidden in a field***  
which a man finds (*does he have to dig it up?*)

and then *hides again* (like bury it)  
and then he sells everything he has  
to buy that field?

I mean, at least the slave was honest  
when the master came back—  
he could've said that he lost the talent  
and then maybe the master  
would have helped him search for it?  
There's that wonderful story  
about sweeping the whole house until  
you find that one thing that you lost...

Or why not this scenario: Here's your talent  
I watched over it,  
robbers tried to take it  
but I held fast,  
aren't you glad Master,  
that I didn't lose it?

I've always thought the punishment  
for the servant who hid his talent in the ground  
was so harsh,  
so, over the top,  
so exaggerated.

***How exactly*** is this  
like the kingdom of heaven, Lord?  
Where one risk that isn't taken,  
where playing it safe  
results in being thrown out in the dark  
where there is great weeping  
and gnashing of teeth...

I mean I'm just not feeling this parable.  
How about [are] you?

Is it because I've never been  
a finance kind of person?

Did the other two servants  
take financial planning classes  
in Hebrew school?  
They obviously knew how to make these talents,  
this money, grow!

Investing, trading, playing the stakes to their  
advantage;  
being willing to roll that financial dice  
and would you look at that gain!  
Apparently two of them got 100% return  
on their investment.  
Isn't that amazing?

Risks make me nervous, especially financial ones  
—makes my palms sweaty.  
I'm most like that last servant;  
*(which might be why I don't like the parable)*

You see I'd plant my talent in nice clay pot,  
where I know it will get some good sun  
and I'd try and remember to water it  
occasionally.  
then I'd dig it up  
and find that it has a nice earthy patina.  
But there it is;  
didn't I take good care of it, Master?

Maybe some of this discomfort  
could be that this parable  
gives us an angry master  
who we assume is Jesus.

In fact, most of the parables  
in Matthew end with a person or group  
condemned for being wicked or foolish.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Simpson Duke, *The Great Texts: A Preaching Commentary, The Parables* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2005)  
pg.49

It makes Jesus (if he is the master)  
seem so judgmental,  
which is hard to reconcile,  
when we're only  
14 days away from Advent  
and celebrating cute baby Jesus.

I have to keep reminding myself,  
that a parable is always  
an exaggerated story to make a point.  
Which has to mean it can't only be about  
successful returns on investment.  
In fact I think if the servant  
who had been given 5 talents  
had only been able to increase that  
by 2 % the master still  
would have been pleased.

**It isn't the amount of increase  
that overjoys the master.**

Those numbers are already so exaggerated:  
one talent was **15 years worth of wages**.  
So, anyone listening to Jesus tell this parable  
would have been floored  
to hear of any master who gave a servant  
5 talents, **75 years worth of a salary**.

And then to hear  
that the servant doubled that  
—**150 years worth of salary**—  
(Holy moly!)  
it is so over the top it is was probably laughable.  
In this parable, the amount of talents given  
and then returned,  
**is generosity that can't be matched.**  
So the increase that the servants create  
can't be what makes the master happy.

It isn't a numbers and finance game,  
no one in real life would replicate that kind generosity or profit.

The talents must point  
to a different kind of treasure.  
A treasure that has the potential to grow  
and grow exponentially.

If the parable does its job,  
then it points to something bigger  
and beyond the story itself.  
So, knowing the treasure is something grand and wonderful,  
perhaps we can read  
the parable like this...

The kingdom of heaven is like this:  
There was a man, a master,  
who was as close to God as it gets  
when it comes to extravagant generosity.  
*(I want you to keep that in mind)*  
And the master knew  
he was going on a long trip of sorts,  
a long trip where his being away  
was going to be hard on everyone.  
So, he called in 3 of his closest managers  
and handed his treasure over to them.

Since he was going to be gone for a while,  
he was hoping that the 3 men  
would be able to take this treasure,  
and do something enormously generous  
and therefore,  
life changing for others.

Knowing that changing people's lives and world  
would be costly, he gave **all he had**  
to the those three.

To one manager, he gave 5 talents  
or 75 years worth of treasure.

And to another he gave 2 talents  
or 30 years worth of treasure,  
and to another he gave 1 talent,  
or 15 years worth of treasure.

He gave to each of them according to  
what he felt would be good for them to handle.  
Then he was gone.

Now in after quite some time  
this master returned and was eager to hear  
if the 3 managers had been successful  
at doing something meaningful  
with the treasures he given them.

**Had they been willing to take  
such an enormous generosity  
and do anything?**

Well it turns out 2 of those 3 men had!

Two of them were wildly successful—  
it was a risky business  
to take such a treasure  
but they make it grow,  
and though it probably hadn't been easy  
they stuck with it  
in the master's absence.

The man, the master was overjoyed!  
That is exactly what he'd hoped for  
when he'd given them all of his treasure  
and had gone away.

But that last manager wasn't successful.  
The third man was too cautious or complacent  
—the jury is still out—  
and according to the third man the master  
was unfair in how he dealt with others  
and this treasure.  
He claimed, you see,  
the master reaped  
where he didn't sow;  
turns out it this extravagant master  
left no instructions  
where generous treasure was concerned.

The third man remembered that time  
there was a stranger casting out demons  
in the master's name  
but he wasn't on the master's paid staff  
—and the third, overly-certain manager,  
remembered how the master hadn't minded at all;  
saying, *that whoever wasn't against them was for them.*  
Oh yes, the master reaped  
where he didn't sow alright.

So, the third man  
hadn't done anything with his talent:  
he'd done absolutely nothing  
with the treasure the master had given him.  
He'd buried it to be exact  
so that no one could even tell  
he'd ever been given any treasure  
at all.

And when the master found out,  
he was so heart-broken and disappointed,  
he was upset.

The master told him,  
*you had such potential  
and you've wasted it;*

*you buried my treasure in such a deep well  
that you ended up defensive and protective  
over something you didn't do anything for.  
Instead of generous  
you were greedy.  
Don't you remember it was a gift in the first place?*

*You think I reap where I don't sow?  
Are you upset that I am so generous?  
You did the exact opposite  
of what I'd hope you'd do with my treasure.*

Well, the third man replied,  
I've seen you before giving out treasure  
to every Tom, Sally and Mary!  
You were so generous to everyone  
and that made it seem to me  
that you must not care about the treasure at all  
if you were willing  
to give away in such a hasty manner.

What happens when you tell me  
to give someone your treasure  
and **they just walk away?!**  
What happens when they don't want it?  
Seems like that is a complete waste!

Doesn't it make more sense  
to just hold on to it,  
when you know I'll take good care  
of the treasure;  
when you know  
I can be trusted with the treasure?  
Besides, you didn't give us any parameters  
on how to handle it  
when the treasure got out of hand!



The master looked at that third man  
and said, *but if you had been willing  
to see that the treasure is mine to give  
and yours to share,  
you would have had a much fuller life.*

*If you had really looked at my treasure,  
instead of burying it,  
you would have seen that it is  
by its very nature,  
meant to be shared.*

*Instead, now you're just someone  
who buried the treasure and kept it to yourself,  
which made you lonely  
and cold-hearted,  
it made you cautious and suspicious  
and it made you unhappy  
**instead of full of life.***

The parable may not have ever been about financial success.  
But perhaps it was about the treasure and generosity and compassion.  
The gospel, the world changing treasure;  
the good news,  
that in Christ,  
God is extravagantly, over the top, generous.  
Being given any measure of talent,  
knowing any fraction of Christ's gospel  
means that we'll be willing  
to risk the good news of life transformation  
on any and all of God's people;  
which will be pretty risky.

And I know that some of us  
don't feel quite like risk takers.  
Especially after a year like this one.  
The parable points out

we do our selves *in for some weeping*  
*and gnashing of teeth,*  
*and lonely, dark nights*  
if we aren't willing to give  
even a part of what we have been given  
over to God's people  
in God-given generous ways.

The numeric outcome of souls converted  
isn't the concern,  
but the effort, the willingness to risk  
-to get out there and do something  
—that is what this master is about;  
an unstable, uncertain, risky personal adventure.

What we often remember is  
the harsh punishment from the master at the end of the parable  
—but that focus comes  
at the expense of forgetting  
the generosity of the master  
in the first place.

The parable says he gave to these slaves,  
each according to his ability.  
And he gave generously.<sup>2</sup>  
The master gave with the kind of generosity  
that is so over the top  
and so extravagant  
that it cannot be outdone.

Until it is.

Until two of these servants  
are able to do exactly what the master did  
with the treasure  
—multiply it in abundance!

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid pg. 53

This is a master who starts out with generosity  
and does nothing but give.

Even when the third man says,  
here take what is yours back,  
the master gives that away too.

This master is overjoyed  
when the generosity of his treasure  
yields even more.

When more generosity is generated  
the master says,  
I will keep on giving to you.

Isn't that the message?  
We can't know  
what giving others the treasure will result in;  
we can't know  
how giving others, the good news might end up  
—we can't know  
the gain or success or even the failure.  
It isn't ours to know  
and it never has been.

What is ours to know,  
is when we crack this parable open  
we learn that it points  
to a God who is more generous  
than we can imagine or comprehend,  
and who invites us to be as generous  
as the master is himself.

To risk the treasures on others.

To live lives that can take a the gospel  
to 75 people  
and watch it become 150 people.  
Or maybe it won't.  
Maybe it will just blossom to 30,  
or yield nothing at all.

That is of course the risky business  
of generosity with this treasure.

Most of us think that risk taking  
is all about the results  
it produces.

But I think this parable tells us  
that if we are willing to take the risk,  
then we can in good faith  
leave the rest to the Master.

When we see not a harsh master  
but a generous one,  
what might we accomplish  
on the master's behalf?

It seems God is willing  
to risk being generous on us,  
and if we want to live in new life,  
then we'll have to dig up our talent  
and be generous with it,  
even if it has a slight patina to it.