

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

St. Stephen's Church, Richmond, Virginia

Preparing for Sunday, November 19, 2023 // Proper 28, Year A

The Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

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. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Background and general observations

This parable is disturbing to many people. Yet it promises a rich discussion.

In chapter 25, we have three major parables about the coming of the Son of Man. The first (the parable of the ten bridesmaids) and the third (the parable of the sheep and goats, "as you did to the least of these...") are found only in Matthew's Gospel. The second of the three parables, this parable of the talents (vv. 14-30), is also found in Luke's Gospel. These parables seem to invite us to imagine a peculiarly attentive and vigilant life of anticipation.

A "talent," in this context, is defined as a monetary unit worth about twenty years' wages for a laborer. And the word from which "trustworthy" has been translated—pistos—has a more nuanced meaning that is closer to "faith." In other words, the virtue in this parable could be about more than trustworthiness; Jesus' lesson seems to underscore an element of risk that might, for some, be central to the call of God and a life of faith. After all, God asks us over and over to act out of faith, not fear. It might be said that the difference between the two slaves who invested their talents and the slave who buried his, is a willingness to live into faith rather than succumb to a fear of failure, or fears, more essentially, of the unknown and of risk.

Ideas for discussing the application of this lesson to our daily lives

1. Many have interpreted this parable to be about wasting, or burying, the gifts that have been given to us. What do you know about “covering up” or “burying” certain gifts, or certain parts of your life? What causes you at times to bury your true life, and what might it take for you to uncover it and bring it out into the open where it can grow?
2. Compare the dynamic of taking risks for the Kingdom of God (as found in Matthew 13:44-45, the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value, examples of selling everything for these) with the safer route of simply holding onto what one has and being content with that. Which best describes you?
3. What are the primary gifts God has given you that might yield a magnificent return, should you invest yourself in them more completely?

Has God given you a marital relationship? A child or children? Good health? Friends and neighbors? A life of prayer? An ability to forgive? An ability to smile, encourage, strengthen and serve others?

What sort of dividends or capital gains result from calling or writing to someone who is lonely, telling a family member that you love them, volunteering to help with a worthy cause?

What sort of return would you expect from investing yourself more completely in those things God has given you?

On the contrary, what sort of dividends or capital gains might you expect from investing yourself more fully in gossip, revenge, anxiety, fear? Can you imagine burying these things, so to speak, and investing more of yourself in a life of grace and loving relationship?

4. Consider the following quotation attributed to Ralph Marston:

The value of what you do will depend on the value you put into it. Success is determined not so much by what it is you do as by the passion and meaning you put into it.

In any field of endeavor that you can imagine, there are those people who enjoy astounding success as well as those who are downright miserable. And if you look closely you'll see that the difference very often is determined by what they each put into what they do.

Whatever is to be done, whether it is a phone conversation, a career, a day at the beach, or a routine task, it is an opportunity for you to contribute something of yourself. And by doing so in a positive, creative and enthusiastic way, you can bring about real, lasting value.

To get something out of it, to make something valuable of it, whatever it may be, put the best of yourself into it. Rather than worrying that life has dealt you a lousy hand, set about to play that hand exquisitely and in your own special way.

Every moment of every day, whatever the situation, is an opportunity for you to add value to your world. Put something good and useful into it, something uniquely you. Put yourself into it and you'll find delight, enjoyment, and fulfillment in what becomes of it.

Who or what has God entrusted to you, hoping you'll put yourself into them? Spouse, children, neighbors, friends, church, colleagues at work? And what about your own body, mind, spirit?



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