

What does it mean to be people of the Parable? It means that we are called to invest wisely all that the Lord has given. It means rising to the challenge and not shirking our call. Each person called to faith in Jesus must become aware that he or she is blessed. The Lord is truly good to each one of his children.

I know the Lord has blessed me with many gifts and with financial resources—just as he has to each person. Not everyone is gifted identically, and scripture teaches that to whom much is given, much is expected. Being a person of the parable is about recognizing not everyone will have the same gifts or financial resources but knowing and acting on Jesus teaching to not squander his blessings. Just as we have been blessed, we are to pour out these blessings to meet needs in our communities and to be in the Kingdom building business.

All people have received blessings from the Lord but not all are aware that everything we have is a result of his love. Some mistakenly believe that they had a role in acquiring material wealth and it was solely a result of their good choices. While free will is part of it, scripture teaches that every good thing is a gift from the Lord.

That is what I hope and pray each of you listening today takes away: that we are each called to use the things God has given each one of us for the building of his kingdom. With knowing that God has given each of us blessings beyond measure also requires an awareness that we are called to use those skills and abilities as well as our money, time, and talent for kingdom building. The parable of the talents is the last in a series of three which Jesus gave his disciples to illustrate what he meant by the command, "Watch!" Its opening words link it to the same time period as the first two, and it reflects the same basic pattern of a master who goes away and leaves a certain company to fulfill a task till he returns.

The parable of the talents is located in Jesus' eschatological where Jesus has instructed his disciples to endure through difficult times and to live in anticipation of the Lord's return. Like all the parables in this section, it exemplifies the certainty of the Lord's coming and how the disciples are to live in the meantime. The teaching of the talents recalls the parable of the faithful and wise slave who

continues to do the work of the master until the master comes. Just as the master in the parable eventually returns, we know that our Lord will return one day to pronounce judgement. Although the master is delayed, he arrives to find the wise slave doing the tasks that have been appointed to him in the master's absence.

The foolish slave, however, has neglected his work and abused his power. He receives severe punishment. Likewise, in the parable of the talents, the master entrusts his servants with his property, and punishment awaits those who have failed to carry on the master's work.

In many ways this is a deeply puzzling parable. A talent is equal to about 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius is a common laborer's daily wage, 6000 denarii or 1 talent would be roughly equivalent to 20 years wages for the average worker. Five talents, the largest amount entrusted to any of the servants, is comparable to one hundred years' worth of labor - truly a fortune!

The talents described in Matthew 25 are clearly not natural abilities but actual money. The Master distributed this money to his servants based on natural ability. There apparently were different skill sets and willingness to risk in each of the servants. To one servant the Master gave five talents because he was a man of great natural ability, he had many gifts. To another he gave two talents because he was not as gifted as the first, and to the third man he only gave one talent because he had the fewest natural abilities. One thing is clear, the number of talents given is determined by the number of natural gifts possessed by each of the servants.

There is also an unspoken implication associated with the monetary gifts the master gave to each servant - the Lord expected these servants to invest the talents he distributed in such a way as to produce gain. The talent then, is something that can be invested, be risked, with the possibility of producing gain or loss. The decision to risk is wholly the servants. He can choose to take this risk, as the first two servants did, or he can utterly refuse to do so, as the third one did.

Lastly in understanding what the master expected is that each servant would make wise choices and invest for the benefit of the absent Lord. The talent is not given to the servant for his own use. It remains the property of his absent Lord and if it is risked it must be on the Lord's behalf. There is no promise made to the servants

that they will share in any way in whatever profits may be made. They have no right to deduct a broker's percentage. As far as the servant could see, all the loss would be his, all the profit would be the Lord's. The Lord alone would benefit by this transaction.

"Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.'"

This first man has gained a one hundred percent return. In terms of the application of this parable to our lives it means that he made full use of his opportunities, not for his own advancement but for his Lord's. He put first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. He made each crucial decision about the investment of his natural ability, not ultimately to profit himself but that the work of Christ might be advanced. He risked the possibility of loss to himself. He took the chance that he might never have the place of prominence, influence or power which he had wanted, but deliberately invested his opportunity along a line that would give God what he wanted: to bind up the brokenhearted, comfort the fatherless, set at liberty the captives, and proclaim the gospel to the poor.

Jesus continues the story of the final accounting:

"And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.'"

The man with two talents had gained two talents more. Just like the first servant, this second servant too had made a hundred percent increase through making wise choices. That means that to the limits of his ability he, too, had chosen to put Christ's cause first. He was not naturally as able as the other man, but he was equally committed. He had risked loss to himself that his Lord's work might prosper. To him, therefore, the Lord says, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of

your master." There is not one syllable of difference between what the Lord says to the man with two talents and what he said to the man with five!

Inevitably, Jesus moves to the climax of his story, to view the accounting of the third man. This third servant had gained nothing because he had risked nothing. There was no increase because there was no investment. He had one great (and long-continued) opportunity to risk himself on behalf of his master, but he deliberately ignored it.

The outcome of the story tells us the nature of that opportunity. It was the opportunity to give himself to God; the opportunity to be redeemed. That one supreme venture was a present possibility all through the time of his master's absence. But he had deliberately put it from himself, and rather early in the game. He had gone and hid it in the ground!

When it was safely buried, he could forget about it and go on about his own affairs. It was not there to make him uncomfortable by constantly reminding him of his master's expectations. But since he took no risk for Christ's sake, he had also no spiritual influence, no impact for eternal good. His life counted for nothing; there was no spiritual power. It had all been lived for himself.

When the Master returned, the third servant had prepared a justification for his choices. In his little speech which he evidently had rehearsed many times he placed the blame solidly at the Master's feet. "You are," he says, "a basically unreasonable man. You expect other people to do the dirty work while you get all the benefits, and if they should fail to satisfy your expectations you are quite ready to accuse them as thieves. So, I was afraid to risk what you gave me, lest I should lose it and would have to face your wrath when you returned. But I have outwitted you. I have kept your talent safe for your return. Here is exactly what you gave me. You and I are even."

What comes next is the climax: The Master does not attempt to debate his character with the third servant. He takes him at his own appraisal of his master. "You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gathered where I have not winnowed?" The editors of the text have done right in ending this statement with a question mark. The master is not agreeing with what the servant says, he is saying, in effect, "So that is your understanding of my character, is it? All right,

then, out of your own mouth will I judge you. If that is what you thought of me, then you ought to have known that you could not possibly please me by failing to get some kind of gain. In that case, you could at least have put the money in the bank, and I would have had some interest on it when I returned."

This third servant had lived his life making choices that were for his sake, not for the gain of his master.

In his selfish blindness what he did not realize was that his one chance to become genuine was to risk himself, by venturing with his master's talent. Had he done so, like the other two men, he would have gained. He would himself have been changed, for to venture is to be changed. To risk for Christ's sake is to find oneself altered, redeemed, reborn.

This third servant had the opportunity to risk and to build something for his Master. But he would have needed to trust in his Master's redeeming grace. He would have needed to rest his hope for eternity upon his work for them upon the cross.

What is the final message of Jesus in telling this story? He is telling us not to hide, not to be timid. He is telling us to be bold and brave when it comes to using our money and our gifts, either individually or corporately, as the body of Christ. When we spread his word and act as his hands and feet, we are being obedient. Jesus is calling to each of us: Step out! Risk! Live dangerously! Take constant chances with your life and goods for his name's sake. Do not try to bottle up your life and your financial resources to hang on to it at all costs. If you do that you will surely lose it.

To live wholeheartedly for Christ is to surrender our wills, our gifts. We are called to live generously just as we have been extravagantly blessed by our Master.

During our minute for Mission Dawn had talked about the special need for people with housing insecurity that Plateau Outreach Ministry is spearheading in the form of rental assistance and ORCA cards. On these cold, rainy November mornings, I think of how blessed I am to be in a cozy, dry home. Not all of God's children are so blessed but it is not the Lord's will for them to suffer while I turn a blind eye.

Please prayerfully consider how the Lord we serve that has so richly blessed each of us is calling you to generously bless those less fortunate within our community.

Please consider giving extra generously because after all, our financial blessings are not ours, they are the Master's.

To live a life worthy of the pronouncement like the Master gave to the first two servants, "Well done," is about surrendering our will. It is about investing our time and our talents to further Jesus' cause, again and again. That is the way to find life. That is the way to watch for his coming. Having risked yourself to become a Christian, now risk yourself again and again as opportunities arise. Live dangerously! Or that also could be written, love dangerously! To live for Christ is to love all humanity with his love. That is what it means to be people of the parable!

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to risk, to abandon, to fling away what would minister only to myself. Teach me to live boldly and to invest my money, time and talents in things that will have eternal implications. For your name's sake we pray. Amen.