



August 6, 2017

Conch Shell

READ: Matthew 25:14 (Common English Bible)

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was leaving on a trip. He called his servants and handed his possessions over to them.”

MEDITATE:

Since I was a child I have collected – and adored – conch shells, more specifically, the queen conch variety. I grew-up in Atlanta, Georgia. But once every two years my family vacationed in the Florida Keys. A family tradition that developed was a stop at Shell World located in the first key, Key Largo. It is a tradition I have now resumed with my wife each time we travel to the Keys. Whether for the day or a weekend, each trip to the Florida Keys includes a stop at Shell World. And, on most of those stops, I select and purchase a queen conch. It is a meaningful tradition and I now own dozens of these beautiful shells – six of them in my office! Each purchase connects me to a cherished childhood memory.

The queen conch is found off the coast of Florida and throughout the Caribbean. The shell is valued as a decorative souvenir and – historically – by Native Americans and indigenous Caribbean peoples to create various tools. The animal that lives within the shell, a marine mollusk, is enjoyed in a variety of seafood preparations. Though not an endangered species as a whole, the queen conch is now protected in Florida waters due to extreme overfishing. The queen conch shell sold by Shell World is responsibly sourced from various Caribbean islands where the conch populations are healthy.

As a child, I chose to collect the queen conch over other varieties of beautiful shells because of their affordability. There are other varieties of shells that many would consider more striking in their complexity and beauty than the queen conch. And they are much more expensive to purchase. But today, as an adult, I have found a deeper and richer appreciation for surrounding myself with this beautiful shell, in both my home and office. In some South Pacific cultures, a speaker holds a conch shell as a symbol of a *temporary* position of authority.¹ “Leaders must understand who holds the conch – that is, who should be listened to and when” writes Max De Pree. As a follower of Jesus Christ I also have been given temporary authority to declare God’s love for a hurting world.

In this rich passage from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus teaches this spiritual principal in a parable, commonly called the Parable of the Talents. In the story – or parable – a man is leaving on a trip. He calls his servants and distributes his possessions to them. What becomes clear in the larger story is that these possessions are not transferred property. The man who is leaving retains ownership. The possessions are simply entrusted for a period of time to the management of the servants. And upon the man’s return, the servants will be held accountable for their temporary responsibility with his possessions. The queen conch shells in my home and office remind me each day of the tremendous privilege – and responsibly – that has been entrusted to me to declare the depth of God’s love until the day Jesus returns.

¹Max De Pree, **Leadership Is an Art** (New York: Crown Business, 2004), 20.

