

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Lindale, Texas
24th Sunday after Pentecost
November 19, 2017
Matthew 25:14-30
The Reverend John P. Carr

Grateful Use of Our Talents

We are all called to do the best with what we have, to make the most of our talents. In the Parable of the Talents Jesus creates a story which illustrates the relationship between Jesus as teacher and Jesus as the returning resurrected Jesus of the second coming. I invite you to place yourself in the position of those who are called by the man who was going away for a while.

The man in the story, who is Jesus, calls his followers to him and gives them his fortune as he is about to leave for a while. He did not leave just a little with them, he left 8 talents. A talent is the greatest unit of Greek money equivalent to about ten thousand denarii. If you google it you will find that a denarius is about a day's wage for a skilled laborer or between \$50 and \$150. So if there were 10,000 denarius per talent and 8 talents were left in the care of the followers, then there were over 80,000 days wages left with those the man trusted.

So, in the first instance the man calls his servants, his followers and leaves his great fortune for their stewardship. When he returns he is checking on the quality of their stewardship. He is gauging how well they followed him and on his return he is judging how well they performed. This is discipleship in the first case and judgement in the

second. Note also that each follower was given an amount to steward according to his abilities. To one 5 to another 2 and to another 1. The man knew the capabilities of his followers and did not give them more than they could be expected to handle. The man gave no instructions about what to do with the talents. He entrusted the talents to the care of his followers.

The one who received 5 talents was a real go getter. He jumped right in and enthusiastically went to work investing what had been entrusted to him. The one who received 2 talents did the same. They both jumped at the opportunity that had been given to them. These two were active in their stewardship. The man gave without conditions and the three followers were the recipients of his faith in them.

The response of the followers indicated their faithfulness. The first two responded with confidence in their abilities and the fortune that had been entrusted to them. The third was neither confident of his abilities or of his relationship with the man who had trusted him.

The first two followers went out and immediately went into action and made a good return on what had been entrusted to them.

The third follower went away, dug a hole and hid his master's money, just the opposite of the first two. The first two were active in their approach to stewardship and the third was passive.

The man, the master returned, and there was judgement.

When he returned to settle accounts he commends the follower who was a good steward of the five talents which had been entrusted to

him. In the same exact words the man commended the follower who had received 2 talents. Both of them had made the most of what had been given them according to their abilities. The third follower on the other had was not commended. The third follower did not report what he had accomplished because he was ashamed of his stewardship. Instead of reporting good results he began blaming his poor stewardship on the master! The master hears him out and then describes the follower in the most unflattering and condemnatory words. *'You wicked and lazy servant! You knew, **did you**, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?'* The master condemns him for his laziness.

The master commends the first two followers with those wonderful words that we want to hear, *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."*

Notice that the master does not commend him and that is the end of it. He tells his faithful servant that because he has acted faithfully in his stewardship of a few things, the master will put him in charge of many things. There is a brighter future for the faithful servant.

Faithful stewardship leads to new responsibilities. The talent that was buried is given to the faithful servant precisely because he is a good and faithful steward of the master's bounty.

The parable is about faithfulness versus laziness of spirit and action. Good and faithful stewardship is an opportunity for greater things, it is a reward and an opportunity for greater service.

Jesus was the man in the story, the disciples the servants/followers, and the talents the mission of God's kingdom. It is a story about Jesus being present and going away for a time having entrusted his creation to his followers. At his return, his second coming, there is judgement as to whether the followers have been good stewards of his creation. For those who are good stewards there will be joy, there will be greater things in store for them. For those who were selfish, lazy and wasteful stewards there will only be sorrow.

The lesson from the first two followers is to do what they did, be good stewards. The lesson from the third follower is not to bury your talent no matter how small you might think that it is. Recall the widow's mite. In more modern terms you might say that the responsibility inherent in stewardship is to use it or lose it.

Jesus loves his people and whether they are very gifted and talented or limited in their abilities. He wants us to use our talents to the best of our abilities. He wants us to courageously and faithfully use our talents to be good stewards of his creation. We are called like the servants, the followers, to be good stewards of what has been given to us by God.

We are only here for a moment in time and we need to make the most of it. When we step across that threshold from life unto life we will want to be greeted by Jesus like the good followers with the words, *"well done, good and faithful servant, ...enter into the joy of your master."*

Amen