

Using our God-given Talents

The gospel lesson for this Sunday, November 19th is Matthew 25: 14-30, the parable of the talents. This parable, like the parable of the 10 bridesmaids that was our Gospel lesson for last Sunday, is one of the eschatological parables of Jesus. In these eschatological parables, Jesus instructs his disciples to endure through difficult times and to live in anticipation of the Lord's return, exemplifying the certainty of the Lord's coming and how the disciples are to live in the meantime.

Some say the parable of the talents is among the most abused and misinterpreted texts in the New Testament. It is harsh and may seem to justify thinking. . . the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (and it's their own fault!). However this is not a "gospel of economic prosperity", instead it challenges believers to use all that God has given them for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Like the parable of the 10 bridesmaids before it, the parable of the talents speaks of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is portrayed in the story of the parable— a story that illustrates how the disciples are to wait until the Lord comes. In this story a wealthy man prepares for a journey by entrusting his estate to his servants. Three servants receive shares according to their ability. Although the first receives five times as much as the last, each receives a significant sum of money. A talent is equal to about 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius is a common laborer's daily wage, a 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, an astronomical amount of money.

The return of the master is certain, but the timing is unknown. After a long absence, he discovers what each servant has done with his property. The first two slaves do business with the master's talents and double his money. Although the first slave earned more than the second, each has done remarkably well with what he has been given. They have performed according to their potential, and they have been faithful to do what the master has required of them. The master's response to each is the same. He commends the slaves for being good and faithful, entrusts them with more authority, and invites them to enter his "joy." The third servant is not so fortunate. In the response of this slave, the master reprimands him for doing nothing with the talents he was entrusted. The third slave admits that he was afraid to lose the master's money. To protect himself, he buried the talent in the ground. The master is furious. He had entrusted this servant with a portion of his property in order that the slave would use his abilities — abilities that had helped the master in the past — in order to turn a profit for his lord. This slave, however, was too afraid to take a risk — even though risky behavior was part of the master's business. Instead, he attempted to secure his own well-being. In the end his unfaithfulness to carry on the master's work cost him severely. The master expected the servants to continue his business, to take risks to make a profit, and to emulate his behavior. Two servants were found faithful, and they are rewarded. Their faithfulness had increased the master's wealth and expanded his estate.

In its literary setting, Jesus tells this story to his disciples to prepare them for the days ahead when their faith will be tested. This parable depicts how the disciples are to demonstrate their faithfulness as they anticipate the return of the Lord. What does faithfulness look like in a time of waiting? In Matthew's Gospel faithfulness is emulating the ministry of Jesus. All who would follow Jesus are to preach the good news of the kingdom to the whole world by going about the work that the master has called them to do. This work includes visiting the sick and imprisoned, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, and feeding the hungry.

So, as we too wait for the coming of the Lord, are we willing to take risks to carry out what Jesus has commanded of us? Will we use our talents—our capabilities—faithfully in the work of the Lord while we wait for His return? Use what the Lord has given us to continue His business, to take risks to expand His estate and to emulate His ministry, that we who are found faithful will hear our Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

Come and Worship and Give Thanks

Sunday 10 AM

Thanksgiving pot-luck feast immediately following the worship service