

Call to Worship

It is written in Luke 12:48 that Jesus said, *'Much will be demanded from everyone who has been given much,'*

We are those who have been given much love, much hope, much peace in Christ Jesus

What have you done with what you've been given? Where in the world have you invested this legacy from the Lord? **As we pray and worship God the giver, we will examine ourselves.**

Prayer of Invocation

O God, we recognize that sometime the signs of your presence lie in the talents and gifts that can be found in our lives. Reveal yourself there to us now. Give to us the confidence of your life within our own. Lord, Open us to all that you would have us be, for you and for others. 'Breakthrough,' into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.

The Word

Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30 [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. To one he gave five valuable coins, and to another he gave two, and to another he gave one. He gave to each servant according to that servant's ability. Then he left on his journey.

"After the man left, the servant who had five valuable coins took them and went to work doing business with them. He gained five more. In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

"Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five valuable coins came forward with five additional coins. He said, 'Master, you gave me five valuable coins. Look, I've gained five more.'

"His master replied, 'Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.'

"The second servant also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I've gained two more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.'

"Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, 'Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven't sown. You gather crops where you haven't spread seed. So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what's yours.'

"His master replied, 'You evil and lazy servant! You knew that I harvest grain where I haven't sown and that I gather crops where I haven't spread seed? In that case, you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins.

Those who have much will receive more, and they will have more than they need. But as for those who don't have much, even the little bit they have will be taken away from them. Now take the worthless servant and throw him outside into the darkness.' People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth."

Living the Word

The Parable of the Talents: This is the third Sunday in Lent. I would like to invite you into some reflection on one of Jesus' parables and some self-reflection, just you and God...beginning with the word 'Joy'. Joy is such a small word. Maybe that is why it seems to keep getting lost. If you go into the bookstore the titles tell you where in your home you can find 'joy': *The Joy of Cooking, The Joy of Soy, The Joy of Painting* or *The Joy of*

Pickling, The Joy of Work or The Joy of Not Working. The clear message from these book authors is that you have to do something to obtain joy, even if it is only to read their book.

The parable of the talents told in today's scripture has a lot to do with joy. Jesus is using this story to try and teach his listeners, which include us, how we can live in the joy of the Lord. In order for us to experience this joy, something has to happen. We have to be willing to put our God-given talents to use for the sake of God's Kingdom. Not what many understand as a kingdom, in fact not at all what the followers of Jesus understood as a kingdom. Jesus knew they would have difficulty understanding so he told them this parable.

A parable is a form of illustration which compares something unfamiliar to something familiar so we can understand it. By placing the two alongside each other, the teller of the parable helps us to comprehend the meaning of the unfamiliar, by paralleling it closely to a situation that we are already familiar with.

In his parables, Jesus used everyday objects, relationships and situations to help the people then, and us now, to understand deep spiritual truths. They were familiar with journeys, weddings, farming, clothing, vineyards, family life, buildings, stones, sheep, seeds, jewelry, money, thieves, parties, friends and people from all walks of life. So these made up the material He drew on for His parables.

The disciples asked Jesus why he spoke in parables. He replied with two reasons: to reveal and to conceal. They were to reveal spiritual truths to those who were genuinely seeking and receptive to the truth. They would understand what Jesus was teaching. On the other hand, the same parables would conceal spiritual truth from those who were too lazy or too stubborn to receive the truth. All they would hear was a story without any apparent meaning. Jesus consistently said: "Everyone who has ears should pay attention." Another reason why Jesus spoke in parables was to get his listeners to work out for themselves what he was teaching.

The word 'talent' was originally used as a weight measure – for 34 kilograms or about 75 pounds, which later became a unit of money. Today we define talent as an ability or gift, because of the way Jesus used it in this parable making the comparison of the money to the gifts God has given us and also other resources that we have at our disposal with which to serve God.

Jesus begins by letting us know that this is a parable: "The kingdom of God is like." The master is going on a trip. He gives to one servant 5 talents or coins, the second servant 2 talents and the third servant only one talent. At first thought that might seem unfair, but here is the clue to what is going on. They were given the talents "each according to their abilities." The master is very well aware of the capacities of his servants, and entrusts each with the amount he knows each is able to handle and cope with. He has their personal interests at heart when he hands them out and that is why they receive different amounts. The master is not trying to cause competition between them, or award one servant more over the other.

They have each been entrusted with gifts, just as we are, for three main reasons: First it helps us to know that the gifts we are given from God, actually still belong to our Creator. Meaning that we are caretakers or managers of these talents, and we are responsible to God as to how we use them. Second, it speaks of God's trust and confidence in us that he gives us the talents in the first place, and then leaves it up to us to best use them. Third, it means that we are important contributors by means of these talents to help further God's Kingdom here on earth. God relies on us to make an impact on the society in which we live by means of these natural gifts, used with the help of the Holy Spirit, as our advocate.

The master, thus, goes off leaving the servants with their talents. Leaving them to their own devices, he doesn't even give them specific instructions how to use what they have received. He doesn't check in with them while he is gone, or call for a progress report part way through his absence. Each of them knows that the expectation is to take the initiative in what they do with their talents. They all have individual responsibility to make something of what they have been given.

God has the same expectations of us. Beginning with prayer - the Holy Spirit is ever waiting for us to ask for guidance and direction and will lead us, yet we need to be actively on the look-out for opportunities to help build the Kingdom. A few questions to ponder - Ask yourself: When was the last time I took the initiative and asked where I could use my gifts in a particular area of service or ministry for God? (pause) When was the last time I saw a need and stepped up with my talents rather than waiting to see if someone else would step up first? (pause)

When was the last time that I realized that with the gifts I have, I could contribute to a whole new area of ministry, and thus expand the work of God's kingdom in the place where I am? (pause) Do I take seriously the responsibility I have before God for using the talents the Creator gave me? (pause) As your pastor, let me say, the harvest is great, but the workers are few...Keep pondering and praying for inspiration from the Spirit.

Imagine what it must have been like for the servants in this parable. The day began as any other day for them. They each had certain chores to do, errands to run, and duties to perform. But when they heard the master's voice they would have to drop what they were doing to see what he wanted. So this time when the master called they each probably expected to be given another task. Instead, he began to hand out talents, a very large sum of money.

What an overwhelming scene, as just one talent alone was worth 15 years' wages! The lifespan in those days were not like today, so most laborers likely did not earn more than one talent in their lifetime. Now their master, unexpectedly was giving them huge sums of money without instructions for its use. Then the master left without giving a return date, which left them all with some uncertainty. So it is also today as we await Jesus' Second coming to earth, without knowing when he will return. While we are waiting, we should be considering what to do with the talents we have been given.

Servants in biblical times were in a social class considered to be inferior with the ruling class. Times haven't changed so much as we still have people who consider themselves superior to others. For some there is still a mindset that considers certain people to be inferior. Publicly, people may proclaim equality for all, but many still value some people as less.

Society sometimes bruises a person with words and actions that make that person feel inferior, which can lead to inward struggles with insecurities, doubt and low self-esteem. Critical personal questions are wrestled with. "Do I have any good qualities? Will I ever amount to anything? Why should I even bother trying?" Paranoia can then set in, along with a negativity that is no part of God's goodness. People with fear can create their own imaginary problems.

The master in the story gave them more than just the talents. He also gave them the burden of decision. Each servant had to choose how to respond to these unexpected gifts. Imagine those questions. "Why did he give this to me? What's the catch? What if something happens and I lose this money? Nothing like this has ever happened to me before; what should I do?"

I have asked God similar question at times. It is not always clear how God wants me to use the talents that I've been given. I've even had times when I couldn't use my talents in a given situation. If we are not careful, frustrations can fill our minds as well. But the first two servants must have had a different attitude about themselves than the third one did. Once we realize that we belong to God, we gain a deep sense of value and worth as a Child of God.

How did the three servants fair with their talents? The servant with five talents wasn't arrogant about what he had been given. He put his mind to how he could use them to best advantage for his master's kingdom. There are dangers in being a multi-talented person: temptations, jealousy and conceit are only three of them.

We need to thank God for the talented people in our church and community and pray that they do not fall into these or other dangers. Some people seem to think that the talented person has an easier life than those who

are not so gifted. It isn't so. Those are the ones who have the greatest responsibility of all before God. As Jesus said: "*Much will be demanded from everyone who has been given much.*"

The masters servant with 5 talents doubled it to ten and "*His master replied, 'Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.'*"

The servant with two talents doesn't bemoan the fact that he hasn't got 5 talents like the first one, nor does he jump to the wrong conclusion that the master thinks less of him by only giving him 2 talents. He may know that it is a mark of the master's care for him that he is not over burdened with more responsibility than he can handle. He is content with what he is given and sets about doubling it to four talents and "*His master replied, 'Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.'*"

The actions of the servant given one talent, show his immaturity. His disappointment in what he received compared to the others causes him to resent the master. He can't be content with what he was given and he buries his talent away from any use possible.

Called to account, the servant is obviously feeling guilty about what he has done, or rather not done, because he spitefully criticizes the character of his master in an attempt to blame him for his own inaction. The servant with one talent told the master that he knew the master as a 'hard man' and he was scared. He tries to justify his lack of initiative by claiming unjustified fears. He was thrown out in the darkness with the words 'evil, lazy and worthless.'

The punishment Jesus assigns to this servant in the story indicates the seriousness of what Jesus is teaching through this parable. If we do not use the talents we are given, there may be a time when they will no longer be ours to use. Others will further the kingdom without us and then we would be left in the darkness of failure rather than the joy of fulfillment that comes through faithful service to the Master.

Five years ago I had the opportunity to review and reflect on the life of Bob Heebink as I prepared and shared his Memorial Service. Bob wasn't a doctor or a lawyer or a master, but he took the talent he was given as an educator and taught others. He knew that to continue to educate others he had to continue to learn himself and right to the end he was exploring and reflecting on who God would have him be for others.

After World War II he taught returning veterans how to be farmers. He taught agriculture in the school system and went out to his student's family farms as part of his educating them; he developed the Community Education Program for the city of New Richmond, WI. Right to the end of his 94 years of life his time included daily reading his Bible, and a commentary about the scriptures.

Bob took the talents he had been given and used them in many ways in his life, often going above and beyond the norm in his work, all of the time staying connected with the one who gave him the talent. If you ever asked Bob how he was doing, he always had a complicated answer that went something like this: "Well, I'm not sure yet as I have never been this old before."

I have to admit that after a few times, I tried not to ask that question when I saw him. Even so, I marveled that he was still and always contemplating each day before him as new and to be experienced. I think if we could ask Bob today I am sure he would share that he knew the Joy of the Lord and is continuing to receive God's goodness...

So what talents can you identify in yourself? In the parable the servants were confronted with the decision of what to do with their talents. What decisions have you made regarding the use of your talents? What risks do you believe there is with investing your talents? How can Christians enter into the joy of the Lord today? What joys have you experienced in your Christian life? Lots to ponder this week...