

Sunday, November 13-19 (A) – Matthew 25:14-30

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Stewardship*

Focus Question: *What is your typical response when someone gives you a lavish gift?*

word of life

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’” Matthew 25:21 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 25:14-30

The parable of the talents follows immediately after the parable of the wise and foolish maidens. A talent was the largest monetary unit of the ancient world. One talent was equal to 6,000 denarii. The amount entrusted to the servants is huge, implying a great deal of trust on behalf of the master.

The servants in the parable do not know how long the master will be gone, but they are to be vigilant and faithful until the master returns. The servants will be held accountable for how they use the resources entrusted to them while the master is gone.

1. *Were the servants actively working on the master’s behalf, or were they only concerned about their own security? How so?*
2. *Why would the master trust the servants with so much money?*

Note the familiar theme of grace in the parable. All are given the gift of talents; none is left outside the gift of grace. The challenge in this parable (as in all of Matthew) for the disciple is: What will we do with the lavish, generous gifts the master has given?

3. *How would you assess the stewardship practices of each of the servants?*
4. *Should all of the servants been given the same amount of talents? Why or why not?*

The first two servants “went off at once” to multiply the gift (vs. 16-17). They trusted in their relationship with the master. They were future-focused, willing to risk for the master’s increase. In contrast, the one-talent servant fearfully focused on the past. “I knew you were a harsh man... so, I was afraid.” He did not trust that his relationship with the master could risk failure. He did not trust his own abilities. His fear immobilized him and led him to hide the gift until the master’s return.

5. *Why did the master respond differently to each servant?*
6. *How would you describe each of the servants using modern images?*

Applying this parable to the church, the message is clear. Do we encourage one another to try to avoid disaster; or do we foster an attitude of trust and faithfulness, of willing risk-taking for the increase of the kingdom? There are some who put the gifts into action. And there are some who, out of fear, doubt, or selfishness, choose to keep it all for themselves and fail to see that the gifts given are intended to be invested on behalf of others. To these is spoken the word of judgment: If you try to keep the gift for yourself alone, you will lose everything.

7. *Where do you find yourself in the parable?*
8. *Would that be the same place as when you were younger? Explain.*
9. *What is the message of this parable for you?*

word *among us*

There was once a village chief who had three sons – each with a special talent. The oldest cared for the olive trees, providing the village olive oil for food and trade. The second son was a shepherd, keeping the herds in good health, providing food and clothing for the village. The third son was a dancer, bringing cheer, beauty, and joy to the village.

One day, the chief had to go on a long journey and left the village in his sons' care. For awhile, things went well, but then the cold winds began to blow. The olive branches, cracked from the ice, failed to bloom. Soon the villagers had no fuel, and they begged the first son to cut down the trees. He finally relented, for he knew it was foolish to save the trees only to lose the village.

The ice made it impossible to travel, and soon the villagers had nothing to eat. They begged the second son to kill the sheep so they wouldn't starve. At first he refused; but he finally realized it was foolish to save the sheep only to have the people perish.

The villagers had just enough food and fuel to survive, but the hardships broke their spirits. They lost hope and became desperate. One by one they left the village in search of a better home. The chief finally returned to find smoke from his own chimney alone. Troubled, he rushed into the house, surprising his sons. "What has become of the trees? Where are the sheep? And what has happened to the people?"

The first two sons with sorrow explained what had happened to the trees and the sheep. The father consoled them, "You did your best to save the village. But what has become of the people?" The third son spoke up. "It hardly seemed proper to dance during such suffering. And besides, I wanted to conserve my strength to welcome you." "Then dance, my son," the father said, "for my village and my heart is empty."

But as the third son went to get up, he grimaced and fell. His legs were so stiff from sitting that they were no longer fit for dancing. The father, filled more with sadness than anger said, "Our village could survive with little food and fuel; but it could not without hope." And they wept.

(Adapted from a story by William J. Bausch, *Storytelling: Imagination and Faith*, Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984)

1. *What gifts have you (individually or as a congregation) been given?*
2. *How do you try to be a good steward of the God-given gifts you have?*
3. *What does it mean to faithfully use these gifts?*
4. *How might you encourage people to use their gifts?*

Prayer

Giver of all gifts, help us to be good stewards of your gifts.

Dig Deeper

1 Corinthians 12:4-11



Daily Discipleship

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last word

This week,
assess your God-given gifts
and your stewardship of those gifts.