

“Quit Playing It Safe with God’s Talents”

Matthew 25: 14-30

This is another one of those Scriptures that I wish was left out of the Bible because once again, it makes me uncomfortable, makes us uncomfortable. It deals with money and no one likes to talk about money in church. Okay, well, maybe the finance people and usually even then, it is not a weekly conversation. Usually the only time the church talks about money is when it is asking for more.

So that’s one thing that makes us uncomfortable about this parable. The other one is the Master. Our tendency with parables is to put God in as the main character because usually that was the purpose of the parable. Jesus used them to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven, used them to teach us about the nature and character of God.

But when it comes to this parable, I’m not sure we want to make such a comparison. The Master in this story seems, I don’t know, irresponsible, leaving all his things to his servants. Did he get references

before he did this? Doesn't the Master have some sort of moral obligation to take care of his responsibilities? Surely, the Master just can't walk away from his responsibilities, from his obligations?

And then there is the whole second part of this parable. In this part, the Master seems mean, maybe even abusive towards the end of the story. I read the Message version but in the NRSV version, the parable ends with the Master getting angry and throwing the servant into the outer darkness, where, my favorite part, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Certainly sounds like the God we have all experienced and know right? Please tell me you can hear the sarcasm in my voice.

It seems rather that in this parable this mean and angry Master goes against everything we have heard and have experienced of our God. Don't get me wrong. I know that there is judgment in this Bible but usually there is grace going along with it. But not in this story. Instead, the Master throws the servant into the outer darkness where there will be

weeping and gnashing of teeth. So much for thinking that Jesus is telling us about the character and nature of God.

Okay, so what do we do with this crazy parable about money?

As I said last week, Matthew is really the only Gospel that deals with or talks about judgment and period before Christ returns again. It is a running theme throughout his whole Gospel. And in this story, what Matthew does is use something that has value like money and applies that value to the Kingdom of God.

Let me explain: the type of money that Matthew is talking about here is called a talent and during Matthew's time, it was comparable to about 20 years of wages for the common worker. Needless to say, that in this story, what Matthew wants us to understand is that this Master is entrusting his servants with an unseemly amount of money.

In Jesus' day, this very action would have boggled the people's minds and had them wondering if the Master was really crazy. Surely, the Master wasn't going to just entrust all his earthly possessions to just anybody. This Master must have trusted his servants and expected them

to take good, really good care of it all until he returned. And in response for that trust, to that trust, the servants had a huge responsibility towards and for the Master's resources. The servants were expected to take care of the Master's resources until he returned.

I hope you see where I'm going with this because what Matthew is saying is that the same sort of responsibility that was entrusted to the servants when the Master went away in the story, is the same sort of responsibility that have been entrusted to us when Jesus went away with the promise to return some day soon. Jesus entrusted to us as the people of God, as the servants of God the work of the Kingdom of God. Jesus entrusted us with the care and well-being of God's creation. Jesus entrusted us with the care and well-being of all his children here on earth until he returns.

In response to this trust, comes responsibility. You know, that whole, with great power comes great responsibility. Sorry, I've been watching too much Spiderman lately. Okay, back to the Scripture: With this trust comes responsibility and God has some pretty high

expectations of how we are going to take care of God's creation until Jesus returns again. When Jesus left, he entrusted to us the responsibility to make sure the Kingdom of God here on earth continues to grow and spread. When Jesus left, he entrusted us to the responsibility to make sure that we continue the ministry of healing and wholeness that he started while here on earth. When Jesus left, he entrusted to our care something precious, something valuable, something special and he expects us to double God's investment of grace and love here on earth.

And in this parable, that is exactly what the Master's servants do. They double the Master's investment, all because they decided to take risks. They decided to step out of their comfort zones. They decided to earn some interest on the Master's investments. All the servants took the risks and doubled the Master's profit, well, all except one. The last servant dug a hole and buried his treasure. He decided to hide his precious something. He decided to ignore the value of his gift.

Now, I'm sure the servant had his reasons for his behavior. We are even told a few of his reasons. We are told that the Master has high

standards and hates careless ways. We are told that the Master demands the best and makes no allowance for error. We are told that the servant was worried that he might disappoint the Master and so he decided to hide the money instead.

Don't get me wrong. The first couple of times I read this parable, I thought the servant did the right thing and that the Master was being just a little harsh on him but as I read this parable again this week, I started to see that these reasons for the servant's behavior didn't really sound like reasons but rather that they sounded more like excuses for the servant's behavior. And I don't think I'm the only one whose internal lie detector is picking up on some inconsistencies in the servant's story. It seems like the Master's internal lie detector is working as well.

You see, In response to the servant's excuses, the Master calls him lazy and says, "Well, if you knew that I expected the best, why on earth did you give me the least of your efforts? If you knew I expected the best, why didn't you even try to do something with the money? The least

the servant could have done was go down to the bank, put the money in a CD and earned just a little bit of money.

When we look at this parable this way, it changes things a bit, doesn't it? The servant is making excuses for the fact that he didn't want to see, he didn't want to appreciate the value of this precious gift that his Master had entrusted to his care. Because if he had, then that meant he would have had to respond in some sort of way. It was just easier to bury the money and ignore the responsibility towards the gift.

As I thought about this parable this week, I have realized that fear must have played a big part in the servant's behavior. Not fear for or of the Master per se, but fear of failure, fear of risks, fear of the unknown, fear of the what ifs. The servant responds in fear to the Master's precious and valuable gift and instead of doubling the investment, fear immobilizes the servant and nothing is gained for anyone.

You see, as we all know, it takes risks for money to grow. That's why we are told the stock market is so good for our portfolios. The stock

market is based on risks. And the higher the risks, the greater rewards, well, unless the Dow decides to drop 200 points that day.

But we all know, it takes risks for money to grow. And the same can be said for faith and love. Faith and love won't grow, can't grow if we don't take some risks.

You see, the third servant didn't quite have the best attitude and outlook when it came to his responsibility for the Master's precious and valuable gift. The servant was more interested in security than service and because of that, he buried the money instead of investing it and watching his efforts grow.

Once again, I hope you can see where I am going with this because what Matthew wants us to understand is that as we are talking about those last days before Jesus returns, we as people of faith, we have to be active in our waiting. We have been entrusted with the care of God's creation. We have been entrusted with continuing the ministry of healing and wholeness that Jesus started here on earth. As people of God, as

servants of God, we have been entrusted with the work of the Kingdom of God here on earth until Jesus returns.

And because God has entrusted us with this ministry, we are called to invest the treasures of our faith in the mission and ministry of the Kingdom of God. Because you see, all the things we are called to do as people of God, as servants of God, all these things take risks in order to grow. They require interaction. They require relationships and relationships come with risks but they also come with great rewards.

Think about it. All the things that we are called to do as people of faith, as servants of God, things like caring, giving, witnessing, trusting, sharing, loving, hoping, all the things that God expects us, wants us to do, calls us to do, all these things cannot be lived or experienced without taking risks.

God has given us something special, something precious, something valuable. God has given us grace and love and God wants us in return to go out and double God's investment. And we do this by going out and sharing our faith. We do this by going out and sharing

God's story of love. We do this by going out and sharing the Gospel message with everyone we know, with everyone we met. We double God's investment by going out, daring the risks, and continuing Jesus' ministry of healing and wholeness here on earth.

We are called to go out and share our faith. And you see, this is where the risks come in. Because if we go out and starting sharing our faith, sharing God's love with others, sharing God's grace with others, people might start thinking we are crazy. People might start thinking all we talk about is God and how God has changed our lives. People might start thinking God has a place in our lives. And we aren't so sure about all that. What if we fail? What if we say the wrong thing? What if we disappoint God? What if people start thinking we are like those street preachers? What if we do the wrong thing?

When faced with those risks, all these what ifs come to mind and fear begins to take over and we realize it would just be easier if we kept this Gospel safe, if we kept this message to ourselves, if we kept God's grace and love confined to just these walls because who knows what

could happen if this gets out? The world might change. The rich might be made poor, and the poor made rich. Our world might be turned upside down. Maybe it is better if we just keep this whole Gospel, this whole God's love and grace, kept it right here and don't share it with anyone.

I don't know about you, but these all seem like good excuses to me. These sure sound more like excuses than reasons for why the grace and love of God isn't running rampant here on earth. These sure sound more like excuses for why we kept the Gospel all to ourselves rather than doubling God's investment. Because it is sad to say, but yes, we people of God, we servants of God are more concerned with security than service.

This past week, the Keeangers went to lunch at Smithtown Seafood. And while there, Ouita gave us a tour of the facility. And it is amazing to think that this old run down empty building is now a thriving place of community and sustainability. Each and every piece feeding each other, working with each other, promoting sustainability and

reaching out to the neighborhood to help provide positive energy and services.

After the tour, we were all amazed by this enterprise, by the investment that it took to create such a wonderful hotbed for community connection. And Ouita said, well, it all started with just a few men and a dream.

And as she said that, I couldn't help but think that is we have for our work for the Kingdom of God here on earth. A few people and a vision, a vision where all live in peace, where all live in joy, where love and grace abounds. We have just a few people and vision but then I realize I needed to correct my way of thinking because in reality we have more than that and we have a better chance of our vision becoming a reality, all because we have the Holy Spirit on our side, leading us, guiding us, shaking us up, waking us up. We have the Holy Spirit reminding us of our call to make love grow here on earth.

We have something special, something valuable, something precious. And we can guarantee our success in doubling God's

investment if we would only take a few risks, if we would only step out of our comfort zones, if we would only worry more about service than security.

Because we have the work of healing and wholeness that Jesus started here on earth to do as the servants of God but we also have God's Spirit, exciting us, challenging us, inspiring us to take the risks. And guess what, I like our chances. I'll take those odds any day over anything the stockmarket has got.

We have God's promise that God's Kingdom will become a reality here on earth one day and all it will take for that to become reality is for us to put aside our fears and take some risks.

May we always invest our treasures of faith in the mission and ministry of the Kingdom of God, risking them all instead of locking them away because, who knows, we may just double God's investment of grace and love here on earth. Amen.