

“Don’t Play It Safe”

Matthew 25: 14-30

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. ¹⁵ To one he gave five valuable coins,^[a] 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.

¹⁶ “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. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. ¹⁸ But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money.

¹⁹ “Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ 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.’

²¹ “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.’

²² “The second servant also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I’ve gained two more.’

²³ “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.’

²⁴ “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. ²⁵ So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what’s yours.’

²⁶ “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? ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Now take the worthless servant and throw him out into the farthest darkness.’

This is another one of those Scriptures which 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. But changing that conversation is another sermon for another day.

The other thing which makes us uncomfortable about this this text is the Master. Our tendency with parables is to put God in as the main character because usually that was the whole purpose of the parable. Jesus used them to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus 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 that 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

Common English Bible 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 the 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.

So again, we find ourselves asking, just what are we supposed to do with this crazy parable about money?

As I said last week, Matthew is really the only Gospel which deals with or talks about judgment and how it relates to the period before Christ returns again. It is a running theme throughout his whole Gospel. And in this story, we find the same to be true as well.

For us to understand what is going on in this text, we need to explore the context for a bit. In this parable, the type of money which Matthew is referring to

here is called a talent. 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. This is a clue to us that the Master wasn't entrusting all his earthly possessions to just anybody. This Master trusted his servants. And, he also expected them to take good, really good care of it all until he returned. In response for that trust, to that trust, came a huge responsibility on the servants' part 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 which was entrusted to the servants when the Master went away in the story, is the same sort of responsibility which has been entrusted to us as disciples when Jesus went away, leaving us with the promise to return someday 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.

This isn't usually how we like to think about our faith or about God, Normally, we emphasize God's grace and God's love which is great, don't get me

wrong. But by only seeing God this way, we tend to see God as a divine presence which will let us get away with anything, leaving our relationship completely out of balance. The parable builds on the relationship between the two parties, lifting up the need for each other to achieve a goal. It calls us as Jesus' disciples to be our best, to do our best for the Kingdom of God. It calls us to embrace working with God as stewards of God's creation here on Earth. This parable points out that God has some pretty high expectations for how we are called to care of God's creation until Jesus returns again. When Jesus left, he entrusted to our care something precious, something valuable, something special. And yes, Jesus 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 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 which 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. It was easier to ignore the

responsibility towards the gift. It was just easier to limit his attention to his own wants and needs.

As I have thought about this parable this week, I realized that fear 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. Instead of doubling the investment, fear immobilizes the servant and nothing is gained for anyone.

And the same can be said for the ways of faith and love as well. Faith and love won't grow, can't grow if we don't take some risks. 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 are called 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 which 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.

As people of faith, we have something special, something valuable, something precious. 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, joining God, working with God as we experience the ripple effects of healing and wholeness moving across our communities, our nation and our world.

Knowing this, 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 what can happen, what will happen when we double God's investment of grace and love here on earth. Amen.