

November 15, 2020

Matthew 25:14-30

Christ Church, Dallas

INVESTING IN GOD

In the first century the talent was the largest unit of currency. Some scholars guess that it would have been between 15 and 20 years' worth of a salary for a day laborer. Do some quick math – double your annual salary and add a zero to it. Then imagine this stunning amount doesn't belong to you, but is now in your care. Of course, the servant dug a hole and buried it to keep it safe.

“So we ask, what is wrong with being cautious? Discretion and deliberateness are virtues, not vices. But with this third servant virtues become vices. Prudence and wariness become self-protectiveness and restraint. Inhibition turns to fear, and the servant ends up refusing the risk of trading in the marketplace.”

He just maintained what was there; a reasonable and safe venture. And this seems to be at the heart of the issue Jesus is trying to teach in this parable.

As John Buchanan writes:

“The point here is not really about doubling your money and accumulating wealth. It is about living. It is about investing. It is about taking risks...The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is not to risk anything, not to care deeply and profoundly enough about anything to invest deeply, to give your heart away and in the process risk everything. The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is to play it safe, to live cautiously and prudently”

Often we hear this parable and think about it as a stewardship lesson of investment, or a reminder to use those skills that we have rather than hide them away. While

these are worthwhile perspectives we should really take a look at the larger picture and think more about this as a parable about callings. The positions in which God has placed you to make a difference; the opportunities to be influential.

The third servant had the opportunity, the calling, to take what had been put before him and do something for the glory of the master. And instead of building up, he dug a hole in fear.

Matt Skinner tells us “this parable is about more than just what you can do, or what God has gifted you with, but it’s a parable about what are you going to do in those moments where you clearly know what it means to represent Christ in a moment and you fail to do so.”

From the first century until today, God’s people have had trouble stepping up to live fully into Christ’s call to live actively as disciples. In the 1940’s Bonhoeffer wrote in the midst of the Holocaust “that the sin of respectable people is running from responsibility.” Running from responsibility is a lot like digging a hole.

Martin Luther King railed about this in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

“Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.”

The middle ground of inaction and passivity of the third servant, of the hiding the talent in the hole, is no ground to stand on at all.

Fear overtakes our desire and ability to do the things we know are good and right. We don’t speak up when things don’t seem right because we don’t want to create waves. Thanksgiving dinners often present us with this reality. Perhaps the pandemic will save us from this situation where diverse opinions often gather. The holes we dig for ourselves are all around us.

Recently I had to take a cab home from the airport because at the last minute my ride couldn't come. I was enjoying the conversation with the cabbie until the subject of the election came up. According to this man the pandemic was all the Democrats' fault and as soon as the election was over it would disappear. It was just a way to blame Trump and elect Biden. Not wanting to make waves and stating that I just didn't agree, I proceeded to dig a hole for myself in the back seat. Perhaps this isn't the best example but you get the idea.

The good news is we have this parable to inspire us to choose another way; to stare fear in the face and stand on the side of Christ; to be bold enough to take a stand in the face of what tries to render us helpless and say "not today."

As people of faith, we are called to take risks. To take risks with these gifts that we have been given. This is one of our greatest callings as those who follow Jesus and live in anticipation of his return. We are not called to maintain the minimum in our lives but to faithfully invest into the lives God has given us.,

As poet Marianne Williamson reminds us:

"We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.

And as we let our light shine,

We unconsciously give others permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear,

Our presence automatically liberates others."

If we think about our relationship with God in these terms, we must ask ourselves, what is our image of God and how does that image dictate the way we act? Those

images we hold in our minds dictate the way we behave. Our image of God determines how we invest in his Kingdom. It all depends on how we view God, and how much we trust the One who entrusts us with his greatest treasure.

Faith is trusting what you believe, which sometimes means becoming vulnerable, putting ourselves at risk.

On this Stewardship Sunday trust God to help you keep the promises you make, just as you know that God will fulfill his promise to be with you as you use your talents, your gifts, your time and your treasure when you serve.

And in the midst of the darkness we are in, may the light of Christ shine our way, so that we may be bearers of light to the world with good news and share the gifts we have been given.

Amen.