

Sermon, November 12, 2023

Matthew 25:14-30

“The Parable of the Talents”

From a strict biblical interpretation this parable is understood as having to do with God’s judgement, which is highlighted by the last verse as it pertains to the lazy slave , when it says, “As for the worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”. It raises theological questions having to do with our relationship to grace and works, but I’m not going to go there today. Instead, I will focus on the issue of talents and their role in the Church.

The parable is about three slaves and the money that their master has entrusted them with, but, of course, the story is allegorical, and is really about the various gifts that God has bestowed on us and how they advance the cause of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God in this context is not about a place called heaven that we ascend to after death, but, rather, that which is amid us, that we strive to set the foundations for, and which we pray for its ultimate fulfillment.

Each of the three slaves has been given money to handle, with the first given the most, a little bit less for the second, and even less for the third. The first and second handle the money wisely and earn even more for their master, while the third, out of fear, buries the money, and thus fails to make it grow.

For a deeper understanding of what Jesus is really talking about convert the word ‘talent’ from an ancient form of currency to our own use of the word talent. So, the story is really about the gifts that God has given us, and how we are to use them in the church and in the world.

Notice, again, that each of the slaves is given a different amount. When it comes to talents some people tend to be more gifted than others, but the issue is not about how many talents you have, but what do you do with the ones you do have.

The first two slaves made the money grow by putting it to use, and managing it wisely, and it is the same with our God given talents. Such gifts were given to each of us for a purpose, and it is both sad, and, perhaps, even sinful, to let talents go to waste. Jesus even compliments the first two slaves calling them good and trustworthy and is calling us to be good and trustworthy with that with which we have been entrusted with.

We all have gifts and talents that can benefit the church, the community, and the world, but sometimes there are thoughts, attitudes, and false beliefs that hold us back from letting our gifts flourish. The third slave is a good example of that. He says, "so I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground". Fear is one of the most powerful things that holds us back from putting our talents to good use. We may have insecurities and doubts about what we have to offer, and so, like the third slave, we hide our talents. We question our own abilities and hesitate to put them to good use. I know what I am talking about and confess that I have often wrestled with self-doubts that have held me back from doing all that I am capable of. Notice as well that Jesus refers to the third slave as lazy. Sometimes we don't engage as we should out of laziness, or, laziness can become a bi-product of our self-doubts. And, so, a good part of what we need is courage, i.e., the courage to look deeply into ourselves and face the doubts and insecurities that hold us back from letting our God given gifts come to the fore. And as you may understand, true courage is not an absence of fear, but, instead, the willingness to do what is needed despite whatever fears we may have.

Also, recognize that there is a very intimate connection between courage and faith. There may be real fears that we have to face, but we need not face them alone. We have our fellow companions along the way who are ready to support, and, if necessary, to give us a little push, and we have our Lord who not only gives us the gifts but is willing and ready to help us find the courage and self-confidence needed to let those gifts blossom and contribute to the good of the Church and reveal the presence of the kingdom of God.

I've been reading a book by a woman named Shelly Francis, entitled, 'The Courage Way', and she starts off with a poem which I would like to end with a few excerpts from it:

It takes courage to teach, to lead, to serve, to heal, to speak up, to stand out, to look inwards, to right wrongs.

It takes courage to walk your talk, to stand your ground, to make waves, to ride waves, to find wholehearted ways, to be known as vulnerable, to love after loss, to love, period.

It takes courage to know yourself well enough to choose where your energy comes from and goes, to trust it's possible to trust what courage can do and give yourself time to find out.

It takes courage to be your whole self so you can do your best work, so you can be the change you want to see, so you can do what your worthy cause most needs you to do.

It takes courage to ask, "How shall I be?" So, I can do [what?] so the world can be better for all.

Amen.

Let us pray: Lord of all Creation, we offer you our gratitude for the many blessings you bestow, and for the special gifts that we each have. May your Holy Spirit be our guide and inspiration as we look inside of ourselves searching for what we have to offer your Church, our Community, our nation, and world. Help us to find the faith and courage to walk each day in the ways revealed to us by your Son Jesus. Grant us the wisdom needed to meet and overcome whatever obstacles and challenges may stand in our way. Grant us the courage to face the obstacles and challenges within ourselves that we may feel confident to use the gifts and talents found in the deep recesses of our being in ways that bring glory to your name and reveal the presence of your kingdom in this world. Open our eyes to the ways of peace in a world so desperately in need of transformation and renewal.