

“Good Stewards”
Matthew 25:14-30
November 13, 2011

The Rev. Dr. Don Dempsey
Palatine Presbyterian Church
Palatine, IL

“A certain man goes on a journey,” but before he leaves, he summons his servants, divides his property among them, not evenly, but according to what they can handle, and leaves them with both the authority and the responsibility for its care.

Will they take care of their Master’s treasure while he’s gone?
And how will they live in the meantime?

With these questions in mind, let’s look at the Parable of the Talents.

The first servant, who is given five talents, invests and trades on it, taking some obvious risks, and doubles his master’s money.

The second servant, who is given two talents, does the same – investing, trading, risking, and doubling his money.

But the one who receives the one talent – he is cautious, conservative, and prudent. He takes no risks, he takes no chances, and instead buries his master’s money in the ground – which according to rabbinic law released him from any liability for the funds, it is the safest, and the most prudent thing he could do.

Now when the Master returns from the journey, how does he respond? To the first two servants, he heaps on praise:

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”¹

These first two servants took some real risks. You don’t double your investment by playing it conservatively. We know that in order to have that kind of return on your investment – you must be willing to risk losing it all.

¹ Matthew 25: 21

And then there is servant number three, the kind of person you may want on your Finance Committee, the prudent, cautious conservative person; he proudly presents his master with his money intact: no gains, no losses, and no risks. And the Master's response is astonishingly harsh. We might have expected the master to say something like,

Well OK. You followed your best instincts. You were cautious and respectful of my property.

Instead, the response is:

"You wicked, lazy servant – take the money from him and throw him out into the street."²

What went wrong here? The third servant grossly misjudged what his Master expected – he did not want just the safeguarding of his treasure, but he wanted it to grow and to multiply.

Playing it safe wasn't going to get the job done. Passively waiting for the master's return wasn't going to be enough. The master gave his servants not just the responsibility, but also his authority, expecting them to take big risks with his treasure. The third servant's failure came by playing it safe, playing it cautious, and by playing it small.

What are the implications for us?

Jesus has left us with his treasure: His treasure is the good news of God's love and mercy for the world.

His treasure is literally the gospel message – it is what Jesus gave his very life for. He gave us that treasure to care for until he returns, and he wants us to grow and multiply his message. He has made us "stewards" of the gospel message.

As we comprehend this good news it can strike fear into our very hearts and souls.

² Mathew 25: 26

What might we be afraid of?

Maybe we're afraid that we will get God's will wrong ... that we'll misinterpret the Master's hopes and dreams and message.

Maybe we're afraid that as we take on the Master's mission, we will be distracted from what we consider to be our own priorities.

Maybe we're afraid that we are inadequate for the task, or

Maybe we're afraid of our success.

Author Marianne Williamson writes:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. 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 own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”³

Again the question before us is: “How shall we live in the meantime?”

Playing small doesn't serve the world, and it doesn't serve the Master's needs.

³ “A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles" by Marianne Williamson, p. 199

We are entrusted with the gospel: with the message of God's love for all ... with the promise of Christ's peace on earth ... And who are we to bury that treasure?

I believe that it is the most exciting privilege that we will ever bear. It is a purpose so much larger than we are, not just to enjoy the treasure entrusted to us, but to make it multiply:

By loving generously in the face of meanness;
By living boldly in the face of fear; and
By living hopefully in spite of our sorrow and grief.

In Jesus' teachings the one plea that is more prevalent than any other is: "Do not be afraid." Fear is a crippling emotion. Fear has prevented more good from being done than any other emotion.

At this time in the life of this church we must not be afraid.

I do not know what the future holds for this church, none of us do, but what I do know is that the Lord needs us. He needs us right now to be his risk-taking, his courageous, and his faithful stewards to do his will right here on earth.

I have come to believe that when we do this -- when we give ourselves over to this highest calling, it is then that we will find true joy. Not merely happiness, not merely satisfaction, but deep, abiding, unquenchable joy.

This is stewardship season. Next Sunday, November 20th, is the day when we are asked to make our annual pledge; it is the day we commit our monetary promises to this church for the year ahead. As important as your pledge is to the life and work and future of this church, I hope that you see that your commitment is more than that.

I pray that at this time – during this season – you will recommit yourselves, to be stewards for the kingdom, worthy stewards of God's gracious will.

Each person in the kingdom of heaven is given a certain number of gifts and opportunities (talents) to serve God. We can either waste those opportunities or we can invest them in a way that furthers the kingdom.

And in the end, our reward for wisely investing our talents will be no less than this:

“Well done ... well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your Master’s happiness!”

Amen