

November 15, 2020  
Rev. Jane Florence  
Title: Living the Risk  
Matthew 25: 14-30



We are going to hear a story that used the word ‘talent’ when it was first told. When we hear ‘talent,’ we think of singing or dancing or playing the piano or maybe America’s Got Talent expands those options. When the story was written, a ‘talent’ was a unit of money. A talent was what an average day laborer made in approximately 15 years of work. So let’s translate that to present day language. Today, the median income in this country varies widely. It varies by education, race, gender, age, and of course type of work, and that’s a sermon for another day. A talent referred to a day laborer’s wage, so let’s just aim high and take it at \$15/hr. today which generates about \$30,000 a year. A talent is equal to about 15 years of work, so do the math. That’s \$450,000 round up to half a million dollars with a little overtime. Five talents is roughly 2.5 million dollars in today’s world. Listen with me to our story for today from the gospel of Matthew updated a bit with today’s math.

So what if ... a man, the boss, the owner, called the “master” calls together his workers; sizes them up and brings three of them into his office. To the first worker, he hands him \$2.5 million dollars. The next is given one million dollars. The third is given half a million dollars. Fifteen year’s wages! More than any of them would ever see at one point in a lifetime. Now before you get too excited. He didn’t give the men this money for personal vacations, new homes, or fancy cars. They were his *workers*. They were to work with what he gave them. This wealthy man is not a micro-manager. He didn’t tell his workers what exactly to do with the money. He placed it in their hands before he left town then leaves them to their work. He is gone a very long time. Years, decades perhaps pass before the owner returns. The rich man had given his workers the amount that he thought they could handle. He didn’t overburden; he didn’t under-fund. He knew what each could manage. After a long, long time, the man returns to see what his workers have done. The one who was given 2.5 million dollars, proudly put 5 million dollars in the owner’s hands. The one who was given one million dollars, proudly puts two million dollars in the owners hands. The one who was given 500,000 dollars - to work with for a long time - returned the \$500,000 to his boss without one penny missing, “for he was afraid” to risk losing the money, so he simply buried it in the ground. As you may guess, the men who doubled their bosses money were praised as good and trustworthy workers. The story says they are “invited to share in joy of their master!” The man who had not done a darn thing to work for his boss was called “wicked and lazy”. He lost his job, and there was “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Hear what the Spirit may say to us in this parable from Jesus.Thanks be to God.

To tell you the truth, I’m not sure I really like this parable at least not at first. I challenged myself and Jed and Lyn to preach from the lectionary - a list of common preselected texts- during this fall. Parables are challenging. First, they are challenging to understand. It even says that in the Bible. When the disciples ask Jesus - “why do you teach us in parables? what do you mean? explain them to us!” They didn’t get them either. Second

they are challenging because if we do crack the meaning open, they are even more challenging to live.

I'll give you some clues on this one. Jesus isn't talking about investment banking. They don't know the Rule of 72 and mathematical probabilities of the wealth management industry. I don't either. Just saying those words make my eyes glaze over. Jesus is telling a parable, a "what if story" to teach a lesson. The master represents Jesus. The workers trusted with the treasure represents his followers. Jesus will leave the followers for a long time. He gives enough time and space to see what his followers will do with the extravagant treasure they have been given. The parable is not about doubling your money in high-risk investments. It's not saying that God loves people more who make more money. Jesus teaches a lot about money, but this is about living. The moral of a parable is how to live each day. Jesus gives space for people to make their own choices. You can choose this day how you will live.

It's also important - if not dangerous to note - that this story in Matthew is placed at a particular time in the Jesus story. In Matthew, Jesus tells this story during what we Christians call Holy Week. Jesus has left the gentle rolling hills of the Galilean countryside. He left the small villages and lakeshores where crowds flocked to hear him and cheer him. He has turned his back on any sense of safety and he has entered the high-stakes, risky journey into Jerusalem. He rode into town greeted by a parade that ridiculed the throne of the Roman Empire. He turned over the tables and cleaned the temple of thieves. He has denounced Woe to the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites of the religious order! He has lamented his pending death in a city that kills prophets and stones those sent to it! He is pondering his own high-risk venture during the last few days of his life and wondering if those who claim to follow him will - follow him and take the risks. Yes, the story is about living and living is taking risks - especially if you are living after the example of Jesus. Especially if you are handed the treasure of life, and connection with the Divine, and the command to love all others. The parable is about what Jesus hopes and expects of his followers where the greatest risk of all is to not risk anything. To bury the gift and do nothing with it at all leaves us weeping and gnashing teeth. The great risk is not caring deeply and profoundly enough to invest your life deeply, to give your heart away and risk everything to live the Truth of your being.

Faithful living is not safe. It is not static. It does no good to know the master if you do not follow the master and risk it all on loving one another. If we bury the goodness, if we squander our time doing nothing of no good, if we put this gift of life in the love of God in the ground and hide it out of our own fear, we have not followed our Teacher one step.

On the other hand, if we take risks and step out and use the gifts of life God has planted with in us- if we quit minimizing the good we can do, and dismissing the monumental risk before us to bring forth God's love on this earth- if we live our lives as fully as possible by investing them in one another - if we risk expanding the horizons of what we think is possible

.. if we live the LOVE we have been given, and the GRACE and the MERCY  
- then with every sunrise we get, we will enter the joy of our master!

May it be so.