

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Leaving a Legacy

What are we doing with all that God has entrusted to us?

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

Hymns: Morning has broken, Cry of my heart, Open our eyes, Lord, Open my eyes that I may see #500

Revised from 2017 sermon at St. Andrew's that was adapted from PCC "Legacy Giving Sunday 2017 Worship Resource"

Rev. Steve Filyk

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A parable is a simple story used to teach a truth,
But is often not immediately understood
by the audience.

Today's Gospel lesson is often referred to
as the parable of the talents,
though some Bibles call it the parable
of the bags of gold.

So what is that truth that Jesus wants to teach US this morning?
Let's review that story one more time.

Jesus tells a story about a master
who charges three servants
with managing property on his behalf.

We are told he gives one servant five talents,
another two
and another one,
"each according to their ability."

When the master returns,
he is quite pleased that two servants took their talents
and multiplied them,
returning double to the master.

The master is pleased with the first two servants,
but he is disappointed with the third,
a servant who was given one talent
and buried it in the ground.

Now at first read, you might think this parable
is about growing your money.

Sometimes this story is used at wealth management seminars
to encourage the up-building
and accumulation of possessions.

It's maybe easy to understand why.

Other times people look past the treasure or currency
to focus on how we should use
our God-given talents, skills and abilities
and make a better life for ourselves
and those around us.

It is easy to understand this 'reading' too.

But both of these interpretations fail to capture
The fullness of this parable.

Let's take a moment and dig a little deeper.
Ever wonder what is meant by the word 'talent'?

The Greek word for talent is *talanton*.
It has two equal meanings:
that which is weighed,
and a sum of money
used by ancient Romans and Greeks.ⁱ

Jewish sources explain that the word for talent is kikkarⁱⁱ.
It was worth about 3000 silver coins
and weighed approximately 95 pounds.

A kikkar is the largest unit of weight in the Bible.
A single talent would be equal to
15 years of earnings for a laborer.

To give you a better sense
of the kind of money we are talking about,
the average Canadian earned about \$55,000 in 2020ⁱⁱⁱ.

If we call this one year of labor and multiply it by 15,
The 'modern' value of one talent would be \$825,000.

All to say that in the world in which Jesus lived and preached,
a single talent was a weighty sum of money.

The servants who received two and five talents
received today's equivalent of \$1.6 million
and \$4.13 million respectively.

The servant who received only one talent,
Was only given a measly \$825,000!

All to say that the text IS talking about money,
The kind of money that most of us
will never accumulate in a lifetime.

PAUSE

What if you were given such a sum of money?
What would you do with it?

Would you put it in the stock market,
And try to cash in on the current buying frenzy?
Would you invest in a fast-food franchise
Or purchase a second home?

Would you go to the casino?
Would you put the money in a savings account?
Would you hide it in a briefcase under your bed?

The third servant took the last option.
He buried his money in the ground.

And the master was furious with him.

That master called the servant lazy.
He scorned and shunned that servant
for keeping that money safe.

So why wasn't the master more understanding?
And why such a scolding if this parable
isn't a lesson on financial success?

There are at least two other important details in the story
that can help sort this all out.

First, we are told each servant was given the money
according to their abilities.

All to say that the master may have known
that the first and second servant would take more risk,
that they had entrepreneurial spirits,
and experience in making money.

And he would have known
that even though the third servant was still an amateur,
that he or she could do something constructive
with the money.

But instead the servant squandered the opportunity.

Burying it in the ground was a denial
Of the responsibility that the master had given.

The second thing we learn
is that the third servant viewed the master as 'harsh'.

Perhaps this is also important.
The third servant only saw bad things
about the master and was fearful.

The servant failed to recognize the generosity of the master,
The servant didn't appreciate the opportunity
to use initiative and creativity
and make the master proud.

Recognizing these details
We can begin to see that this parable
Is not just about working hard or growing your money,

The parable is about God's generosity and our opportunity
To share in God's purposes.

Using this parable Jesus poses the question:

Will we be faithful stewards
of the resources God has given?
Will we delight in God's generosity
And embrace God's purposes?

Let me share with you a story about some Presbyterians
who have invested their talents,
with an amazing return for God's kingdom.

Several years ago, George Van Beek gave some stock
to the national church
to fund new experimental ministries.

These gifts, these investments
have been making dreams come true
across the denomination.

One of these dreams was to change the world,
one bowl of soup at a time.

In 2013, Rebecca Sherbino and Colleen Graham
dreamed of hiring people on the margins:
people on social assistance;

people with various abilities and skills;
people who experienced significant barriers
to employment.

They would do this by making and selling healthy,
locally sourced, homemade soups and stews.

We have their story in this CTV news report:
<https://youtu.be/szZ2Hg5nXIU>

I wonder what George and Evelyn,
Are thinking about their investment.

My guess is that they are proud of what they have done.
And what is continuing to be done.

PAUSE

You may not have much left at the end of the month.
You may not have any stocks to give to away.

But in the hands of God's faithful and creative people
every gift given no matter how big or how small
has the ability to impact more lives
and carry out more of God's mission and ministry
than we could ever imagine.

Our life's work and our legacy are our witness.
The third servant's legacy is fear.
The first and second servants' legacy is faithfulness.

What will our legacy be?
To God be the glory. Amen.

ⁱ Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (USA: University of Chicago Press) 2001.

ⁱⁱ Michael Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (USA: Clarendon Press, revised ed.) 1995; The Jewish Virtual Library – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org; and Chabad on-line - www.chabad.org

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Average Canadian Salary in 2020" <https://www.jobillico.com/blog/en/the-average-canadian-salary-in-2020/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%202020%2C%20the,just%20over%20%2454%2C630%20per%20year.>