

“Risking Everything”
Mt. 25:14-30
Sunday, November 19, 2017
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

Opening.

Jesus tells a story about talents. One person is given five talents, which he grows into ten. Another is given two talents and grows them into four. But a third person is given one talent. The story zeroes in on this guy, because he does not bring a return on the master’s investment. Even the one talent he has is taken away and given to the person with ten talents.

There’s a story about a pastor who was talking to a self-proclaimed Christian. The pastor asked the man if he was active in a local church. The man responded, “No, but the dying thief wasn’t active in a church and yet he was still accepted.” The pastor then asked if he had been baptized. The man responded, “The dying thief was not baptized and he still made it into heaven.” The pastor then asked if he had come to the Lord’s Table to receive Communion. The man responded, “No, but the dying thief didn’t either, and Christ still received him.”

After hearing all this, the pastor commented: “The only difference between you and the dying thief is that he was dying in his belief and you are dead in yours.” (Michael P. Green).

God gives us opportunities to be faithful. We are to act on them, using the talents God has given us.

I. Talents.

In the first century a “talent” was a measure of weight for gold, silver and copper. We don’t know exactly how much a talent was worth, but we do know that it was the largest weight in normal everyday use. One “talent” was a huge amount, especially when it expressed the

weight of gold, silver and copper – extremely precious commodities. (Leonard Sweet).

“Talent” came to be used as a word to describe our unique gifts. Some folks have five talents – we know these multi-talented folks. Some churches have five talents – we know these mega-gifted institutions, with multiple staff and adequate funding.

I suspect that most of us are one- or two-talent people. I suspect most churches are one- or two-talent churches.

Whatever our talent level, God has given each of us at least one talent. He intends that we use that one talent for the good of his kingdom. And if we are blessed enough to have two or even five talents, we are to use all of them to further God’s good purposes.

Whatever talents God gifts us with, we are to risk it all. For Him. For His kingdom. For His purposes.

After all, Jesus risks everything for us. He sacrifices everything for us. He risks everything.

And he loses everything.

Of course, by doing so, he gains everything. He saves the whole world.

II. Risks and Barriers.

So we understand that we are to use our talents, even if they seem meager to us. And we are to risk everything in order to use the talents God has given us. Even if it’s only one talent. Even if our one talent doesn’t really even feel like a talent at all.

But there are barriers to using our talents, aren’t there? There are forces that work against our sincere desire to risk everything for Christ and His kingdom.

Douglas E. Lurton, a reporter and author, tells of an event that took place when he was six years old. There was a store in his little town that was giving away caps -- Pillsbury Best

Flour caps. Any boy who wanted one of those caps could go into the store, ask for it, and get it free. Little Douglas Lurton watched other youngsters go in and come out proudly, each wearing one of those caps. Finally he got up enough courage to go in himself. There was just one cap left, his for the asking. But he lost his nerve. And without saying a word, he turned and walked out. One of his friends said to him, “Did you get the cap?” He replied, “No, I didn't want one” (King Duncan).

How many of us suffer from the kind of fear Douglas Lurton describes? Later, as an adult, he said that every time he thought of that story he felt like crying. But as a writer and as a student of people, he came to the conclusion that there are lots of people tyrannized by fear just as he was.

Fear can be a huge barrier to using our talents. Fear can be a barrier to even recognizing our talents. If we admit we have one talent, even a very small one, we will have to use it. And what if we fail? What if we take our one talent, do our best to grow this gift God has given us, and fail? What if, after all our best efforts, we fail to grow as a Christian? What if, after all our best efforts, we fail to grow as a church? What if God's investment in us does not produce fruit?

Such fears can immobilize us. Jesus tells his Story of the Talents to light a fire under us. He urges us to get busy, get active, and get moving even in the face of fear.

Of course, inaction is not always about fear. Sometimes it's about comfort and complacency. There's a prayer that, I am sure, doesn't describe anyone in our church family. It's entitled “The Pew Potato's Prayer”:

“Dear Lord, please leave me alone. Just let me sit here in my pew on Sunday, and Lord guard my seat, the last seat here in the back row. Please don't let anyone else try to sit here Lord... You know that's my seat and dear Lord please get me home quickly after the service on

Sunday, before these church people try to recruit me to actually do something that I don't want to do. Lord make them understand that I'm happy and content just to show up on Sunday.

Heavenly Father, thank you for hearing my prayer but I've got to Go! Kickoff is only a minute away!! You understand Lord.

“Thanks God for putting some great games on this week and thank you for all sports cable channel. See you next Sunday Lord. Amen.” (Pastor Joan Stock)

The prayer is humorous. But when we think of folks who have risked everything for God – folks in our day and age who are suffering and dying for Christ; saints of the past who were martyred for their faith – we realize how little we often demand of ourselves.

So for you and me, in San Gabriel, California, if we want to be faithful Christians who use our talents – no matter how many, no matter how few – how do we go about taking that risk? What are you willing to risk for God? What are you ready to risk for Christ and His kingdom?

Closing.

“Apathy is the opposite of Faith: Some years ago in South America, a crew of Peruvian Sailors, headed up the Amazon river came upon a strange sight. It was like a scene from ‘The Twilight Zone.’ A Spanish ship was anchored off the coast and all the sailors were stretched out weakly on the deck of the ship. As the Peruvians drew closer, they saw that the Spaniards were in terrible physical condition. They looked the picture of death itself, their lips parched and swollen. They were literally dying of thirst.

“ ‘Can we help you?’ shouted the Peruvians.

“The Spaniards cried out, ‘Water! Water! We need fresh water!’

“The Peruvian sailors, surprised at this request, told them to lower their buckets and help themselves.

“The Spaniards, fearing they'd been misunderstood cried back, ‘No, no we need FRESH water!’

“But they received the same reply from the Peruvians to lower their buckets and help themselves. They finally did lower their buckets into the ocean waters and when they brought the buckets on deck they discovered to their amazement fresh water. They had quit trying. There at the mouth of the Amazon River, anchored for days, too far from land to see the coast, but not too far from the mouth of the River, they had fresh water in abundance.

“Apathy had overtaken them and they had quit. They were resigned to die when all that was needed was to lower their bucket. A small effort would have made all the difference.”

(Pastor Brett Blair)

I don't know what kind of small effort God might be calling us to right now as a church. I don't know what kind of small effort God might be calling you to as an individual. I do know that whenever I lower my bucket into the waters of God's Spirit, clean, fresh, life-giving water is always available in abundant quantities. All that I need I always find. That same abundance is available to you, as well. May you find the courage to risk everything. May you find the courage to lower your bucket into the rivers of God's grace.

Amen.