

"Our Generous Master."

Judges 4:1-7; Ps. 123; Matt. 25:14-30  
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church  
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Consecration Sunday, November 16, 2008

Today is the day when we make a decision about what we are to do with some of the blessings we have received. As it so happens, our Gospel text from Matthew concerns this very question.

This is a familiar text, a rather straight-forward text in some respects. It is a text that highlights the need to take risks and use what we've been given.

Our English word "talent" comes from this text. We define a talent as a God-given ability or special giftedness. Originally, a "talent" was a unit of weight like a pound or a kilo. Sometimes the Bible talks about a talent of silver. That is a quantity of silver. In this story, a talent was equal to around 6,000 denarius.

A denarius was the wage for a day laborer in the time of Jesus. Our minimum wage is \$6.55. A day's wage would be \$52.40. Multiply that by 6,000 and we have \$314,000. There's nothing insignificant about that amount and that's equal to just one talent.

By this calculation, the first slave received 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  million dollars and the second received over \$628,000.

So, using Jesus' parable to frame our understanding of talents, the first thing we might say about the gifts we have been given by God is that they are lavish! Even for the 1 talent recipient!

The parable makes it clear that the Master has his own reasons for distributing the talents as he saw fit - to each, according to the ability of each. Clearly the Master is generous. He isn't a miser.

And he also isn't a micro-manager. The servants are not given specific instructions on what to do with these enormous gifts. The Master departs for a long time and the servants are left to their own devices.

As we hear in the story, the one given the 5 talents went out and doubled them. The next did the same. The third, however, decided that the safest course of action was to hide the talent in the ground and protect it until the Master's return.

(Here we have to avoid the temptation to superimpose our current economic woes on this parable. In today's financial climate, maybe the slave who hid the talent in the ground took the wisest course of action!)

But his actions weren't based on his reading of the financial climate of his day. They were based on his fear of the Master.

All three slaves operated out of their experience of the Master. They had all received amazing gifts. Two treated their gifts as if they were their own (which - as it turns out - they were, because at the end of the parable the Master doesn't take the 1 talent back. He tells his followers to give it to the one who knew what to do with it by taking a risk).

The third slave was overcome by fear and decided the best course of action was to do nothing and just wait for the Master to come back - all the while fretting and worrying over the burden of responsibility.

It is interesting to me that the fearful servant is the one who would have us believe the worst about the Master. The other two make no judgments about the Master. But, their actions tell us all we need to know about him. They know he expects them to make the most of the gifts they are given. In their relationship with the Master they are free enough to take a risk and trust.

In the end it is those who have taken a risk and stepped out in faith who are rewarded, while the one who allowed his fear to consume him and hold him captive ends up with nothing.

There are many things that can make us fearful these days. Hopefully, our perception of who God is isn't one of them. Hopefully our experience of the grace and mercy of God and the knowledge of who God is as he has made himself known to us in Jesus Christ has not instilled fear in us, but rather has led to faith.

In fearful and uncertain times, hopefully the possibility of entering into the "Joy of the Master" can motivate us toward believing and acting differently.

There are aspects of the work of Jesus Christ here at Chapel Lane that we are uniquely gifted to help maintain and grow. What is on the list? Is the spiritual nurture and Christian education of children, youth and adults on the list? Is regular divine worship? Is mission done in the name of Jesus? Is meeting the needs of strangers and neighbors here and abroad?

Is giving hope to the hopeless, modeling faith to the fearful and sharing love with the unloved on your list?

Do we believe that, together, we are striving to be a faithful witness to God's love in Christ? Do we believe that our programs and our

missions, our ministries and our people are worthy of our support and trust? If so, how much support?

We are not called to hold onto what we have been given, but to make the best use we possibly can of our talents, abilities and resources.

Now is not the time to hedge our bets or hold back.

God has not gifted us just so that we can hold on for dear life or live in fear of the future, but so that we can live life to the full and live life in response to the life that was given for us.

Someone once told the story of a Session meeting at a church where the elders were wringing their hands over the state of the church's finances. One of the elders joked, "What we need is for somebody to die and leave us a really big gift." One of the other elders immediately spoke up and quietly said, "Someone already has."

God was willing to take a risk on us, risking the message of the gospel of hope and love with folks like us. This parable is not given to guilt us or to shame us. It is to remind us that the gift of salvation we have received from God is worth more than we can possibly imagine and it is meant to be shared, to be used, to be a basis for growth.

We live on the love of God. It is a love that is inexhaustible. It comes from our generous Master. It is a gift.

Sometimes people talk about wanting to be more like Jesus. Some folks wear WWJD bracelets. Do we want to be like Jesus? Do we want to be like the Master? The core quality of the Master in this story is that he is generous beyond anyone's wildest expectations.

Let's take a risk and say that we want to empower this ministry with our generosity and our giving, risking that the work we do here will be of lasting importance and value in our lives and in the lives of everyone who encounters the living Lord through us.

Does the pledge card in your hands reflect a risk or is it just routine? Does it create a little pinch and say we are trusting God to relieve that "pinch" or is it well with our means which means we really don't mean to trust God to help us fulfill it? Does it make us a little joyful when we think about our pledge, or just joyless and stressed?

Friends, we have been brought together in Christ so that Christ might shine in and through us. We have been gathered together to achieve great things for God, here in this place and beyond. May the generosity of our Master inspire us to follow in paths of generosity and joy today and always.

Amen.