

**Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Matthew 25:14-30 | The Rev. Barnabas Pusnur | November 19, 2023**

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As I was getting ready to prepare the sermon this week, I thought I got lucky with today's gospel. It's the second week of the stewardship campaign and here is the gospel talking of money- 5 talents, 2 talents, and 1 talent. A man is going on a journey and gives his workers charge of 5 talents, 2 talents, and 1 talent and expects them to manage this money, invest, and make him a profit.

Just to be clear, in the historical context of the gospels the word 'talent' was a measure of money. It was not a reference to skills or abilities as we usually use the word now. For instance, there is the parable of a man who owed the king thousands of talents but was forgiven his debt. Of course, the figurative point that the word 'talent' could be making depends on the parable. In one parable forgiveness of thousands of talents could mean forgiveness of sin and wrongdoings, in another parable being given charge of a couple of talents could mean being responsible for resources and opportunities.

But the reason why I got excited was I thought I could start my sermon by saying: "Dear fellow parishioners, I exhort you to give 5, 2, or 1 talent to the stewardship campaign, as you are able." However, to my dismay I found out that a talent in New Testament times was a lot, I mean a lot of money. 1 talent was equivalent to 15-20 years of wages for a laborer. 5 talents would be a lifetime worth of wages. There is no way I can ask my dear fellow parishioners to give a couple of talents to our 2024 stewardship campaign!

But coming back to the gospel, this parable of the talents is in line with a lot of what Jesus has been teaching in Matthew's gospel right from the beginning.

Don't just hear, act. Don't just rest on entitled claims, live it out. Show a real change in life, not just a superficial change. Act according to the heart of the matter. Produce the fruit. Matthew's Gospel is filled with

teachings and stories which make this point again and again.

Jesus' sermon on the mount is a call to live an ethical life. Be the salt and light where you actually give flavor and light to the world. Don't be salt without taste or light hid under a basket.

Get to the heart of the matter. It's about more than murder or adultery. It's about the evil in human heart. Address the core. Be like the wise person who builds his house on the rock and not on the sand, implying one who not just hears the message of God, but acts accordingly.

Jesus says you will know people by their fruits. Be fruitful. The fruitfulness in today's parable, where the first two people double the money that they were in-charge of, is the point the parable seems to be making. The Christian life needs to live out. We cannot be known simply as people who believe in A, B, and C. Instead, we are called to be people who live out A, B, and C.

It's so much easier to simply say I believe in Jesus and his ways but so much harder to live according to that way. Living that out is often a difficult, messy, and risky business. In Matthew's gospel Jesus is asked, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." According to Jesus all the instructions of the scripture hang on this command to love.

We are called to love, but how precisely do we love in a world that is filled with so many complicated realities. For instance, we seek to provide shelter for our migrant guests, even as we try to address intractable issues of

homelessness that plagues our cities. We want to help and support victims of violence and hatred in Israel and Palestine but are at loss as to how specifically to go about it. We want to be the salt and light, we want to bear fruit, but figuring out how, is a humbling journey.

Yesterday, the Diocese of Chicago had its annual convention. With over 103 congregations represented, we sat together doing the business of the church. And in all our business: from budgets, to elections, to resolutions, our aim was to try and be the church that God has called us to be. Even though we are never certain of the future, we go ahead in faith, trying to figure out the way of love that we must concretely live out.

The business of love can be confusing, can be risky, can be filled with wrong attempts. But what is worst is the fear that keeps us from even trying. Each of the three workers in the parable were called to manage a huge sum of money and make profit. The only reason that the person with the 1 talent does not do so, is because he was afraid. He was afraid of the risk, of the potential failure, and he knew that his boss was extremely demanding of profit. He says, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

Fear can paralyze the effort to love and to live the way of Jesus. Faith is the antidote to fear. Our faith in God. If we fall and fail in this journey of love, we get up, we learn, we correct ourselves, and try and love again. We know that the God who has called us to this life of love, will walk with right along us in this journey.

I love the blessing that is often given in the church and is attributed to the French author and poet Henri-Frédéric Amiel: "Life is short, and we do not have too much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us, so be quick to love and make haste to be kind." If I may take the creative liberty to retell today's parable in the context of this command to love, some of us have been given charge to live a life's worth of love, 5 talents, to some is given 30-40 years to love, 2 talents, and to some just 15-20 years. Life is short. What do we do with this treasure of love within us?

Out of fear, may we not dig a hole and hide it! Instead, let's take a step of faith and share this treasure of love.

Obviously, at the end we don't gain more talents for the talents we invest. But that love we give may indeed flourish in the life of someone else for years to come. We might just end up multiplying love and making the world a little better place. May Christ our loving friend and savior help us to walk in this way of love. Amen.