

19TH November 2023 Christ Church Sermon

The Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Often when we read the parable of the talents we see the word talent and we immediately think of abilities and the things we are good at. We often say of someone who is good at something—you're talented. But when we look carefully at this parable we see that these talents are in fact large portions of money that are given to each servant to manage. So what might this parable be about? Jesus uses this parable to teach us about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' parable begins with a man who was about to leave on a journey. And he entrusted his servants with the task of managing his financial affairs while he was away. He divided this responsibility amongst his three workers according to their ability. He gave five talents to one worker, two talents to another worker and one talent to another worker. I guess you could call this 'diversification'—putting your eggs in several baskets rather than one. Dividing your assets to provide more opportunities for growth and reduce risk.

And then, when the master returned, he called his workers before him to give an account of how they managed his money. Two of the workers doubled what they were first entrusted with and the master was full of praise for them. He said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servants. You have been faithful in handling these small amounts, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

But the third worker did nothing with the one talent that he was entrusted with. He had simply buried it. When this worker gave account of his actions, the money was taken from him and given to servant with ten talents.

Now, in Jesus days a talent was used in two ways: it was used as form of currency and also as a measure of weight. Bible scholars believe that for the average worker one talent was worth more than 15 years of wages.

Now if we look at this in today's environment what might a talent be worth today? In Australia, in 2020 a person on the minimum wage working full time would earn about \$40,000 a year. This suggests that in today's context a talent could be worth at least \$600,000

Australian dollars. Can you start to see what an incredible responsibility the master has entrusted to each of these three workers!

Even the person who has received one talent has received an incredible responsibility and an awesome opportunity. If only this servant had recognized this opportunity!

Now like all the parables, we need to look for the principles that Jesus is teaching us through them and ask: what does this mean for us?

Firstly, notice the **trust** that the master puts in his servants. How he delegates responsibility for so much of what belongs to him to his servants. He believes in his servants. He has full confidence in his servants. Secondly, notice the way he **divides** the responsibility – that he does not divide it evenly but he divides it according to their ability. In other words he knows the ability of each of his servants and divides responsibility appropriately.

In this parable we may choose to see the Master as Jesus, and we, his church, are his servants. He has given each of us responsibilities. In giving us responsibilities he recognizes our unique ability and gives us responsibilities according to our abilities. This parable has often been interpreted as a frank and simple call to work hard at developing the gifts and talents that God has given us. Sadly, too many of us feel we have failed to fulfill the responsibilities God has given to us.

Maybe we feel we have failed to recognise the responsibilities God first gave us and have failed to try, to take risks, to learn, to grow, to ask questions. Maybe we feel we have failed to use our abilities to fulfill our responsibilities. The challenge we face is to recognize our responsibilities and use our abilities to fulfill our responsibilities while we have them.

While it is true that God wants us to use his gifts and to multiply them for the benefit of his Kingdom, we are not judged according to the quantity of the work we do for God, nor even by the quality of that work. Rather, we are judged by our attitude: by our willingness to do as God wants us to do, by our willingness to risk all that we have been given for the sake of the Kingdom just as Jesus risked all of himself for our sake.

As Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9).

But if we reduce the parable of the talents simply to saying that we must be productive for God or else be condemned, then we miss what is so good about the Christian life! We miss the good news of Jesus Christ, the good news of the grace and mercy won for us on the Cross.

If we see this parable as all about productivity, we will end up like the servant who failed to invest the talent that his master gave him. We will end up being afraid—worried more about how well we are doing in the eyes of God than we are about actually doing anything at all.

Consider the servant who buried the talent entrusted to him. He was afraid and he took no risks. He did not see the potential for growth and he buried what he had to keep it safe. He did nothing. In what areas of your life are we burying our responsibilities and not exercising them according to our abilities?

The parable of the talents is not a lesson about success or our degree of productivity. It is a lesson about our attitude and responsibility. It is about faithfully stepping out with God's treasure in our hands for the sake of others.

The servant was afraid - and so he did not try. What counts is not whether we win or lose, but whether or not we even try. What counts is whether or not we dare to risk those things that God has given us. What counts is whether or not we invest ourselves in God's kingdom:

- Whether we take what we have and use it for God's purposes.
- Whether we pass on the blessings we have received.
- Whether we seek to build community and bring hope to the strangers among us.
- Whether we reach out to those in need and show them the love that God first showed to us.
- Whether we try to multiply joy and divide sorrow.

- Whether we willingly use what we have been given in the service of God.

Do we work with the resources that God has given us for his sake or do we focus on the fact that we might fail and so refuse to try? Do we use the gifts we have been given to build up the church and to bring praise to God or do we use those gifts only for our own benefit?

God gives us many gifts and resources. Why he does so is not always clear, but what God expects of us is clear. God expects us to develop the good things we have so that the world around us can benefit from them, so that those gifts might be fruitful in us, and add to the good things that God's world needs.

God, like the master in today's parable, trusts us to do well with his love, to develop the gifts he gives us so that all the citizens of his kingdom may benefit from them. God has blessed you with the priceless gift of salvation. Therefore we have nothing to fear! We can love God and love life. We can take risks with what God has given to us so that others may experience God's love and his kingdom may grow near and far. Amen.