

Scripture Reading  
Matthew 25: 14-30

### **Risking Faith**

There are three things that stand out for me in today's parable

1. The God of the Bible is right into taking risks.
2. what God requires of us is not success, but faithfulness.
3. God calls us to trust over fear

When I first read the scripture of the day, I thought "how appropriate" as I recognized that on this day we would also be having a meeting about Centrepoint following the service. What a great time to be reminded of what it means to be good Stewards of our faith, lives and world. It also seems very appropriate as we are summing up the work that you all have done with the Stewardship committee in the last few weeks. I have been so impressed and excited by where we believe God is leading us as a congregation. And overjoyed by the dreams and visions many of you carry for this place. As we come together as a community of faith in our work and mission we hope to live out not our goals, dreams and visions but God's. Let's take a moment and look at what this scripture might mean as we consider all these things.

"The gospel we just heard is known as "The Parable of the Talents." That word "talent" has a double meaning. Its original meaning in the Greek of the New Testament refers to a huge sum of money. In the ancient world, a talent was worth what an ordinary labourer earned over the course of 15 years. Thus, giving each of his servants one or more talents, the master in this story is entrusting each of them with a fortune.

The second meaning of the word "talent" results from one interpretation of this very story. As the master entrusts his servants with talents, so God entrusts each of us with abilities. "Talent" has thus come to mean ability or skill. We say that someone has a talent for music or cooking or business.

But "The Parable of the Talents" isn't really about money or ability. It's about something even more important. "The Parable of the Talents" is about trust.

The story opens with an act of trust. The master is about to leave town on a journey. He entrusts his wealth to three servants. Each is given a different sum of money. Yet each is given a big amount – one talent or two or five. It's clear that the master trusts each of his servants. He even hands over the money without any instructions."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Charles Hoffacker is rector of St. Paul's Parish, Baden, Md., in the Diocese of Washington

“The God of the Bible is right into taking risks. That’s obvious, isn’t it? Otherwise we human beings, such unstable creatures, would not have been left in a management position on this precious planet.

The degree of free will God has permitted us is high risk. It means that God is prepared to even place limits on divine power so that we might have such freedom. That was really a dicey decision.”<sup>2</sup>

Before the master went away he entrusted his servants to take good care of his money and invest it well. What the master did, before he went away, was to entrust them to trade with these large sums, and to try and make a handsome profit. They could have invested in Wine, oil, grain, textiles, pottery, land, shipping, or whatever. He wanted them to use their wisdom and skills to make their own decisions.

“They were to put what was entrusted to them to good use. Commerce, like human life itself, can be a precarious business.” But the master knows all about that; he understands. He wants them to try; to give their best. That is what counts. What requires of us is faithfulness, not success, trust and risk over fear.

“After a long time, the master returns and calls in his three servants. Two of them have doubled their money. The third has made nothing at all; he returns to his master exactly what he received. It turns out that this servant has simply buried the money in the ground, a common security measure in ancient times. He reveals the reason for his action: fear of the master. His trust in his master was zero, so he reduced his financial risk to zero. Yet he reduced the possibility of profit so that it, too, was zero.”<sup>3</sup>

Bruce Prewer wrote “I invite you to recognise one key element in this parable: the Lord truly places the responsibility in the hands of his servants. This is not make-believe stuff. . He was serious. He does not even stay in the background, like a back-seat driver, giving gratuitous advice or tut-tutting. Nor is he like a driving instructor with calm nerves yet with a separate brake pedal for him to employ in emergency.

The Lord of the Gospel fully trusts his servants. He leaves his country and travels abroad. It is now entirely up to them whether they succeed or fail. A high risk strategy indeed!

The first two servants honour the trust placed in them. They take some risk and put the money to use. Their talents became highly productive in the commerce of this life. The person with five talents made a profit of another 5 talents. The one with two talents, gained a profit of two more. Not bad at all, a 100% return over the long period the Master is absent overseas.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/63Sun33.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Hoffacker

These two receive the Master's gratitude. "Well done, good and trustworthy servant. You have proved yourself in a small way, now I will entrust you with something big. Come here and enjoy your master's delight."

Did you notice the excuse of the third servant?

Charles Hoffacker writes "The third servant paints an ugly picture of a grasping master who demands success. What this servant gets for his trouble is exactly the rejection he fears. He's a small-minded man who insists that his master is just as small minded.

The other two servants, however, recognize generosity when they see it. The piles of money thrust their way reveal a man who's generous, who takes a risk, who accepts them, even honors them. Finding themselves at the receiving end of such outrageous trust, they feel empowered, and are willing to take risks of their own. The love their master has shown them overcomes their fear of failure. They realize that any master who treats his money managers in this open-handed way is more interested in them than in turning a profit.

This brief story about a master and his three servants turns upside down the standards of the world. It announces that the worst thing that can happen to us is not failure. The worst thing that can happen to us<sup>4</sup> is that we fail to recognize the gifts we have been given. The worst thing is not losing out. "The worst thing is never risking. In the eyes of God, the fear that keeps a treasure in the ground is an act of atheism. The freedom that puts that treasure at risk – and may even result in its loss – that is an act of faith."

"The Good News of Jesus gives new meaning to success and security. Success is found not in accumulating more than we can ever use, but in our willingness to risk in response to God's invitation. Security is found not in keeping pace with our rising paranoia, but in the utterly reliable God who trusts us before we trust ourselves, who risks, and asks that we risk also."<sup>5</sup>

And here is the even better news my friends. I believe this is the kind of faith and risk we are living out here at Squamish United Church. The kind of trust and faith that is about risking what we have in the hope that it will become more. Not more for us, but more for the kingdom of God - which is everywhere when love is present. We are called to risk of what we have so that all of creation experiences the abundant love, grace and generosity of the Holy.

I went back and looked at a sermon from a series I did in October last year on the parable of the mustard seed. This is what was said "You are sent into this world to believe in yourself as God's chosen one and then to help your brothers and sisters know that they also are beloved sons and daughters of God who belong together." (Finding My Way Home - A Spirituality of Fundraising pg. 34)

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<sup>4</sup> IBID

<sup>5</sup> IBID

“The Bible is unambiguous about God’s concern for the poor. “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land” (Deut. 15:11, Isaiah 58:6-12) From its birth the church has recognized the privileged place of the poor in God’s sight...Jesus says to his disciples, “in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.” ( A Spirituality of Fundraising pg. 35)

That to me gives us just one more reason to build a place like Centrepont. It is the joining together of community allowing us to share in our gifts and needs. Henri Nowen writes “Community is the fruit of our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own.” ( Bread for the journey pg. 47) Why would a church community offer their land to the social services agency of their region? Because God calls us to love our neighbour not from a distance, but with a radical abundant, relational love.” To risk in love, as we share our talents both those of financial and of God given abilities.

It’s been awhile since I preached on the parable of the mustard seed, and yet “As we have been working on this project with Sea to Sky Community services I have been holding ... the image of the mustard seed closely. I believe as the church we are called to move with the living, breathing, spirit of God, sowing seeds of faith that will bring forth an abundant harvest.” That will share of the talents we have. “SUC mission is to ‘be an inclusive community caring for God’s world.’ In this project we have the opportunity to sow and grow with faith like a mustard seed. As I see it the seed of faith we are already offering has the chance to grow into more than just a bush on the corner of 4th and Victoria. We have the opportunity to grow like a large abundant tree intertwining itself with everything it can touch. The Spirit calls us to be church that shares the hope of the gospel in a way that touches everything within our reach without abandon, with radical inclusiveness and faith-filled action.

A church outside the lines would be willing to care for the whole person body, mind and soul. That is what we hope to be about. Together we seek to be a place for all who hunger and thirst, offering a sacred space and place to ask the questions of life that matter. A place to wrestle with the spirit, no matter who we are or where we come from. Through connecting church and community we are saying as boldly as possible that we believe the spirit of the living Christ is present and working in this world here and now.

And not just within the walls of our cathedrals. “The Spirit is free and wild, not in captivity – not even the captivity of the church as we know it” Ezekiel gives us an image of the Spirit rising up from the church, overflowing its walls and rushing out into the wilderness. Peter Short (former moderator of the UCC) Often says for things to grow and move and be alive and vibrant - “The one who holds the center must first get a grip on letting the centre go!” Emotionally, I acknowledge for many of us “(this letting go) feels bad! But it really is the only choice we have”.

That is our story of faith today. Moderator Gary Paterson calls us folks “Heretics of Hope.” because we don't seem to embody the story of "church dying" very convincingly. It's not that we

aren't dealing with fewer resources than before or buildings that need to be rebuilt or big questions about the role of faith in life, but we just aren't believing the story that somehow this is all bad news, or that our faith and practice should be shaken by it. Paterson suggests we are no less Christian for being in this situation, and in fact, we could be discovering that these times are just what is required to get clear on their faith. These are the times that Christianity is made for.”

So on this day as we celebrate all the gifts you offer and the huge risks you are taking as a community of faith I want to thank you for being faithful stewards, for investing your talents as faithfully as you see possible for “The kingdom of heaven is like: a man going abroad, who called his servants and trusted all his capital into their hands.”

For The God of the Bible is into taking risks and requires faithfulness, not success. God calls us to trust over fear. May we continue to be faithful as a community of faith.