

**Sermon** November 19, 2023  
[Matthew 25:14-30; the Parable of the Talents]

Pastor John Michael Barich

The Gospel of the Lord  
**Praise to you, O Christ**

Oftentimes, with such a challenging reading like that, I say, “These are the words of Jesus.” It’s hard to hear the gospel! (So, that’s why *I’m* here!)

So, Jesus speaks another parable. Today, Jesus has been speaking in parables about just about every Sunday this autumn. And as with the others, it’s important for us not to rush into interpreting the story before understanding it on its own terms.

You see, Jesus creates little worlds in these parables to help us understand his teaching, and ultimately, what life looks like when God is present.

Why, even folks who study language speak in terms of “semantic domains,” or worlds of words. For example, when you’re in the kitchen this Thursday, that warm little world contains words particular to its domain. And when I was growing up, that little warm world of the kitchen was my grandma’s domain: baster; roasting pan; rack; meat thermometer; giblets; gravy. Need I go on?

Jesus here uses the language of commerce. So, think Wall Street, and the 1% ... and the 99%. Sorry.

But the man going on a journey is a *very* rich aristocrat with vast property, and he staffs his estates and affairs with slaves. And the sums with which they are entrusted are very considerable. A poor person could live at subsistence level for 15 years on just one talent. The three slaves have different status according to their already proven competence in business dealings, and so the sums entrusted to them vary. The arrangement is a kind of investment on the Master’s part. And of course, he expects a return for his money.

And for the servants, it’s an important chance to prove themselves and advance; this is a situation in which they can succeed or fail. So, they have much to win ...or lose

The Master’s confidence in the first two proves justified, and they’re rewarded with further responsibilities. They’re invited to enter into the joy of the Master. It’s his homecoming celebration, now made all the merrier for the appreciable profits the servants have made for him since he went away.

In entrusting the third servant with only one talent, the Master’s already judged his business acumen as less developed, less reliable than that of the others. However, his failure lies not in not in being no good at business, but in in not even trying.

He did what was generally regarded as the safest thing to do with money. He stuffed it under his mattress. Was he fearful, ignorant, or really just lazy, as the Master suggests?

But by not taking a risk, he took the one sure way to lose.

My Dear Friends in Christ, this is not a cynical comment on the unfairness of life: “The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.” But rather, the logic of financial investment is revealed here: To the one who has made a profit, more will be entrusted; their portfolio grows. But from the one who has not, even the initial loan will be taken back.

So Jesus’ parable compares the business of *life in the service of God* to the business of *commerce*. And it compares the *use* of all that God has given, all that we have, all who we are in God’s service, with the use of a financial loan in order to make a profit for the investor.

Now the reason the Master is furious with the third servant is that for business purposes, the whole point of money is to be *used*, and spent, and circulated, in order to make more money. Money merely hoarded it might just as well be thrown away.

What God has given to you and what God has given me, ourselves, our lives, our faith, our abilities, our gifts, our possessions – all of those things are given to us in order to be *used*, and spent, and put into circulation. Our lives are to be expended in God’s service, becoming thereby the source of further blessings for others, and for ourselves along the way. And only in *that* sense is God like the rapacious investor interested only in profit.

God calls for returns on the loans made to us. To try to merely preserve them is to lose them. In order to keep his talent, the servant had to risk it. And if he didn’t risk it, he was *bound* to lose it.

As I’m becoming more familiar with you, this congregation, I know that you’ve lived long enough to know that you can’t really get through life by playing it safe all of the time.

And that’s even more true for a life lived for God. All that God gives us is given to be used and risked in new ventures for God’s service. And every new step that we take in living for God is a risk.

But if we stand still here, on Queen Anne, paralyzed, like the third servant, by fear of failure, clinging to safety, to what we already are, and have, we will, in fact, lose what we have.

So what’s condemned here in this parable is the cautious, defensive policy which finds its chief aim in survival, security and self interest. We can only keep it by risking it, and going further, and every successful risk leads to being entrusted with more, again, to be expended and used, and risked.

Jesus, elsewhere, summed it up this way:

“Those who want to save their life will lose it. And those who lose their life for my sake, will find it.”

Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Thanks be to God. In the name of Jesus, Amen.