Introduction *Heaven is like what?!* *Funny Math*

Check-in & Introductions

Sermon Reflection Notes

This parable of the talents is a really familiar one for most of us. We are used to hearing the story, but we might not be aware of just how much money a 'talent' actually is. A talent was worth 6000 denarii, meaning roughly 15-20 years' worth of wages at the time. For us, that would translate into around 4 million dollars. It's a ridiculous amount of money, and what is even more ridiculous is that in the parable, the master entrusts it to his slaves. Preposterous! We know where this goes. The slave who buries the money and keeps it 'safe' ends up in trouble because he didn't increase the wealth. The ones who took the risks are rewarded and praised and the other slave is banished to darkness.

We know the story. We've probably heard an interpretation of it that goes like this: *When we appear before Jesus, there will be an accounting of how we used our talents, our God-given gifts. We should use our gifts, of painting, of pie making, of plumbing, of whatever we have, for God. Don't bury them. Let your little light shine*. We've heard that version.

As a side note, one of the larger truths in Scripture is that God doesn't seem to use people's abilities so much as their frailties, their brokenness, their fears. Moses cannot speak, Jeremiah is too young. Isaiah isn't holy. Jonah bolts in the opposite direction. It's worth asking: where are your weaknesses? Where are you broken? That's where God will use you.

But in the context of Matthew, this scripture isn't about being stewards of talents God doles out. It's a story (one of 4 in a row) of somebody returning. And in all the stories, the one who returns is Jesus. This story is about a particular kind of gift that Jesus gives us between his first coming and his second. The landowner in the story gave the slaves a ridiculous amount of wealth that they did not deserve and had no business managing. Jesus has left us in charge of something more valuable that we can understand or imagine, something we also have no business managing. But it is a gift we are given anyway. The gift of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew, when Jesus dies, he promises to be with us always. And that presence comes to us through the Holy Spirit, residing within us.

The master, Jesus, spent time with the servants, teaching them how to do business. How to operate as he operated. They knew how to invest in the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is what moves us to forgive, to heal, to feed, and to love our neighbor. In Matthew, the first two slaves doubled their gifts by sharing them with others. In the economy of God, the way we double our gifts is not by storing them up, but by investing in the things that Jesus invested in: love of God and love of neighbor. Forgiveness grows when we forgive. Mercy grows when we show mercy. Compassion grows when we show compassion. The Kingdom of God subverts the economic assumptions of this world. In the Kingdom of God, the law is love and its gospel is peace.

The third slave didn't trust such an economy. This servant was offered a valuable gift and sat on it. The third slave didn't trust the master and didn't believe in an economy of abundance. In his mind, if he used the gift, it would mean less for him. And when the master returns, the third slave lashed out, saying the master was harsh, reaping what he did not sow. It must have broken the master's heart, Jesus' heart, for that story simply isn't true.

Jesus is the farmer who scattered seed all willy-nilly, the shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep to find one. Jesus is the landowner paying late workers a full day's wage because there's plenty to go around and the father running down the road to welcome a prodigal son home because the well of love never runs dry. The third slave believed a lie that God is cruel. But God, Jesus, is a boundlessly generous friend who goes away and gives us far more than we want or need to imitate him in his absence. That is the truth and the miracle…and the abundance of life with God. Don't bury the gift. Harness it. Remember the ways of Jesus, who guided you in the way of love and generosity.

Scripture

Matthew 25: 14-30

14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to
them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his
ability. Then he went away. At once 16 the one who had received the five talents went off and
traded with them and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two
talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and
dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those
slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents
came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents;
see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy
slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter
into the joy of your master.' 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying,
'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master
said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few
things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 Then the
one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were
a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, 25 so I
was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But
his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not
sow and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the
bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the
talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 For to all those who have, more
will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what
they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness,
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Discussion Questions

1. What are we usually told when we hear this scripture text? How did this sermon shine new light on the parable of Matthew 25: 14-30?
2. What is the gift Jesus gave to his disciples, and continues to give to us between his first coming and his second coming – a gift that is more valuable than we can imagine and something we are completely unqualified to manage?
3. Where are we to invest the gift?

4. What was the attitude and belief system for the third servant? Why did it land him in the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth? Where is that darkness?
5. Last week, Question 3, stated that Revelation 7 is clear that heaven isn't an exclusive party. Society's assumption speaks to the narrative that says heaven is a selective process, with limits on who makes it, and with a judgement system that has required beliefs for all. How is this played out in the ways we are governed and the ways our economy works?
6. What does it mean that the Kingdom of God subverts the economic assumptions of this world? What is God's economy all about?
7. What does the baptismal liturgy mean to us when we hear the words *"May God's Holy Spirit work within you, that you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ"*?

Closing Prayer

Grace filled God, you have given us gifts well beyond our ability to understand or even to see. In the power of your Holy Spirit, you give us gifts for forgiveness, for healing, for feeding, for loving our neighbors. In Holy Communion, your Spirit nourishes and sustains us. With that same Holy Spirit, you give us the gifts of teaching, of serving, of generosity, of leadership. All these gifts are beyond measure and all are of infinite worth.

And on occasion we see your Holy Spirit at work. We see the wind of your Spirit dismantle what was, and we see your Spirit evoke what is to be. We see your Spirit override barriers, change the conversation, and signal your rule even among us. And so, this day, we pray to recognize the gift of your Spirit among us. We pray and we wait – all too often unconvinced. But we pray that even in our unbelief, the wind of your Holy Spirit will blow us closer to you. We pray in the name of Jesus, who in his absence, gave us this gift of his presence until he returns. Amen.

"Don't bury the gifts. Give them away."