

To Give and Give and Give Again

Matthew 25:14-30

The last verse of our Communion Hymn (#9 in our hymnal)

*To give and give and give again
What God hath given thee
To spend thyself nor count the cost
To serve right gloriously
The God who gave all worlds that are
And all that are to be*

That is the message in a nutshell in today's well-known Parable of the Talents. To give and give and give again in the life and service of God's Kingdom is what Jesus expects of us.

I think the *parable of the talents* is misnamed. After all a *talent* was simply a weight (75 lb to be precise) representing a weight of either silver or gold. And the parable is less about the talents than it is about what the different servants do with them. The first 2 servants – given 5 and 2 talents respectively, do quite well, doubling the value of their talents. Of course Jesus doesn't go into details. What did those two successful servants do in order to double their masters investment? Did they buy and sell commodities? Did they invest in real estate? Did they get into manufacturing? We don't know much about them except that they done real good.

The true anti-hero in the parable is the 3rd servant who was given just one talent. Before we get to feeling sorry for the 1-talent servant, think of what 75 lb of gold or silver could buy you? A *talent* would today be worth \$1/2 million or more. The servant was far from poor. But he was fearful, timid and unimaginative. Rather than risk losing some of that money the master gave him the 3rd servant just sat on it. He buried it until his master came back. By being cautious and avoiding risks he risked losing everything.

The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is not to risk anything, not to care deeply and profoundly enough about anything to invest deeply, to give your heart away and in the process risk everything. The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is to play it safe, to live cautiously and prudently.” (John Buchanan, 'Feasting on the Word', Year A, Volume 4, p.310).

Because the parable is about the danger of letting our fearfulness prevent us from multiplying the gifts the Master gives for his Kingdom, it should be called the *Parable of the Fearful Servant*.

If we were to apply Jesus' parable today, who are the servants to whom the Master entrusts such great riches? We are! Does it matter whether we see ourselves as the recipient of 1, 2 or 5 talents? I know that any of us would rather be the recipient of 5 of those bundles of gold, just as we'd rather win a \$50 million lottery prize than a \$1 million. But heck, winning a million dollars sounds pretty good! One of the clear points in the parable is that Jesus is telling us that we – both as individuals and as the Church of Christ – have been entrusted with immense riches.

*All the riches of his grace,
All the fullness of his blessing,
All the sweetness of his love
He gives to you, He gives to me.*

Oh the blood of Jesus – it washes white as snow

Oh the Word of Jesus – it cleanses white as snow

Oh the love of Jesus – it makes the Body whole. (refrain)

The words of the song are based on Ephesians 1:7-8 where Paul tells us that, “*In (Christ) we have received redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.*”

We have each struck it rich in a Powerball jackpot kind of payout! The immensity of God’s grace has been entrusted to you and to me. We have received new life. Our sins have been *forgiven*. He has taken our brokenness and made us *whole*. He has promised us *heaven*. He has filled us with *joy and hope and love*. He invites us to leave behind our wasted years and enter into *abundant life*.

What would it mean to take the immensity of riches with which we have been entrusted by God and, like the fearful servant, bury them, to risk using them? It might mean accepting God’s unmerited forgiveness but refusing to forgive someone else. It could be knowing the love of a friend, of parents, of family and the love of God but not loving in return. It could be *having* a friend but not *being* a friend. It might mean spending your resources, primarily on yourself. It could be never volunteering in any service project that might disturb your favorite TV shows. It might mean never stopping to give God thanks for all the abundance God has given you. It might mean a kind of *me-first* mentality, rarely helping others. It might mean never taking risks in your life, the risk of falling in love, the risk of taking a chance on somebody, the risk of investing in another human being, the risk of being hurt. Don’t we know lots of people like that fearful servant? Don’t we sometime act like that fearful servant ourselves?

What are some ways we might take all the riches of God’s grace with which we have been entrusted and boldly invest them so that they are multiplied in the service of God’s Kingdom?

- We might start by living boldly from the perspective of abundance instead of the fearfulness of scarcity. If we fear that there won’t be enough we will always hold back. If we’re amazed by the abundance of what we have received we will look for ways to share and use those gifts.
- We can tithe. We can risk investing the Biblical standard 10% of all that we receive in the work of God and his Church.
- We might commit ourselves to a generous cause that we believe in, passionately pursuing and giving one’s self in the pursuit of that cause.
- We can volunteer and invest our time and energy in the service of others.
- We can sing with joy and praise God with our whole heart, soul, strength and mind.
- We can invest in the lives of our children – mentoring, teaching, nurturing, supporting – helping them grow in love and faith.

- We can share with others the good news of Jesus Christ, listening to learn how God has acted in other people's lives and telling how God has blessed and nurtured you.
- We can work for peace and justice.
- We can simply be generous, not only with our money but also with our time and our attitude towards others.
- We can live joyfully and lovingly.

St. John's as a parish took great risks in the mid 1980's when they decided to develop the precious space they had in downtown Stamford surrounding the church and providing parking for members. Canterbury Green was the result and the income from the lease of that property has helped to multiply the impact St. John's has had in serving the needs of this community through the St. John's Foundation. We have been able to give away several million dollars over those years to support programs fighting homelessness, feeding the hungry, empowering young people and raising up people in need. And that work continues.

We have taken the risk of investing in our sagging buildings and re-building them through St. John's Rising. Now we are exploring ways of opening our doors to use this building in the service of downtown Stamford as well as the ministry of this parish church.

We are presently beginning to explore the possibility of hosting a Spanish speaking worship service. We have been growing our mission partnership in L'Acul, Haiti and are planning a mission trip to Haiti with our young people this spring. We continue to explore new ways of serving the needs of the world around us.

As a parish we continue to explore new ways to multiply the riches of God's grace. I am hoping that we will begin to explore ways to use social media to better communicate, especially with our younger members. We need to continue to welcome the many visitors that come through our doors and help them find personal support and community in our life, worship and fellowship. We are working to expand the pastoral care we can provide through Stephen's Ministry.

Today is Loyalty Sunday when we are invited to make our financial pledge to God through the work of St. John's Church. May our financial pledge to God through the ongoing work of St. John's Church in 2012 be a joyous opportunity...

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