

Sermon 102515 Stewardship  
Scripture- Luke 19: 11-27  
Sermon Title- The Sermon on the Amount

“I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but for one who has nothing, even that will be taken away.” (Luke 19: 26)

This is a ‘hard’ text. It paints a picture that we would rather not see. It speaks a truth we would rather not hear. It implies an injustice that most of us find difficult to accept. It cuts across the conventional wisdom of what the teachings of Jesus are about. That is the reason to examine this text, particularly during Stewardship time.

In an age when the rich have more than they could possibly need and the poor have considerably less than they need, where is the “good news” in a gospel that would appear to reward the affluent at the expense of the poor. We might well call this a “hard text for hard times.”

In the Gospel of Matthew, this story is called “The Parable of The Talents.” In Luke, the story is the same but the details are different and it is called “The Parable of the Ten Minas.” Both talents and minas were denominations of money (1 talent=60 minas). In our Luke story this morning, the master is going on a journey and gives the same amount (10 minas) to different servants

with the command, “Put this money to work until I come back.”  
(19: 13)

Upon his return, the first servant doubled the money and the second increased the money by half. They were both rewarded accordingly. The third servant hid the money because he new the master was a hard man. He was afraid so he returned the same amount to the master. The master *was* a hard man. He took the 10 minas from the man and gave them to the one who had earned 10 additional minas with his 10. Again, our quote from Jesus, “I tell you that for everyone who has, more will be given, but for one who has nothing even that will be given away.”

Now, if we were to re-write this parable according to what we’d like to think, presuming the master represents God, the response from the master would have been, “There, there, I understand that you were afraid. You did the best you could under difficult conditions. After all, you could have lost money in an unwise investment. You can keep what you have. You could have more, but you could have less, too.” Then it would have been a parable about a cautious servant and forgiving master.

That, however, is not what the text says. His money was taken from him and given to the most successful investor. This is like a pauper having his money given to Warren Buffet. Let’s try

to look at this parable as more than a hard scrabbled fable on capitalist economics.

Let's start by considering that this might be a story less about the usage of money and more about the usage of time. Jesus was always warning his followers that the end of the age would come like a thief in the night. Therefore, the faithful are encouraged to be watchful and alert. Some people took that literally and spent their time waiting for the rapture, waiting to be delivered. Why feed the hungry or even bury the dead? Jesus is coming. Why plant crops and weed the fields? Why worry about the harvest? Jesus is on the way and the end is in sight.

That is the wrong message. In the parables about time, Jesus warns that what counts is not so much how we anticipate the future but how we use the time we have, how we use the resources that we are given, and how we called to do God's work in the present. Today's parable is about engaging the world in the time we have with the resources that we are given. The question is not, "What do we do when he returns?" but "What do we do in the meantime?" The Gospels make it clear what Jesus has in mind. In Matthew 25, Jesus says, "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink" and so forth. When asked what he meant, he responded, "when you did them to the least of my brethren, you did them to me." Jesus message is unmistakable:

We are not to simply wait, but we are to do the work of the one who sent us.

The third servant, the real subject of this parable, suffers from what we might call, a loss of nerve. He is given an opportunity and he finds himself in a state of paralysis. He is afraid that he will mess it up so he does nothing with the opportunity. Remember, this parable is called, in Matthew's Gospel, the parable of the talents. Talents meant money then but means something very different to us. Talents are God given gifts that we are all blessed with in varying ways and varying degrees.

Great talent or modest talent must be practiced, used, and employed. If the talent given by God is not used, it will be lost. As it is said of athletic skill, "Use it or lose it." The third servant did not use his talent and it was taken away from him; he lost it.

This is a story about time and how we use it. It is also a story about talent and how we use it. When we consider that time and talent are gifts from God we realize that time and talent are our greatest gifts from God. Jesus tells us the story to remind us that we will be judged not on how much we have, or even how much we get, or even how much we give. We are judged on how wisely and faithfully we use what we have in the time that we have it. God has great expectations. So too must we.

This is a parable about stewardship, and so is this sermon. You are asked in the time that you have to use wisely what you have been given for the kingdom of God. The gifts that you have do not belong to you, but to God. They are not yours to possess but rather they are yours to improve, and if you do not, you will lose them.

We live in difficult times. I know that and you know that. There is a sense of despair. Fear and caution abound and you and I wonder what we can do. Life is harsh and unfair, and judgment swift and arbitrary. The rabbis tell us that when a wise man heard that the end of the world was near he went to his garden and planted a tree... an act of courage, audacity, and hope... a faithful use of his time.

John Wesley, the father of Methodism, lived in times not dissimilar to our own. He was asked by a cautious person, “But what can I do for the kingdom of God?” Wesley replied:

Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways that you can,  
In all the places that you can,  
At all the times that you can,  
To all the people that you can,  
As long as you ever can.

This is a time to consider your use of your time, talent, and treasure. A shrewd investor might say that your church is a risky investment. He would be right. If you don't invest in your church, it could go away and what might that say about your stewardship of your God given time, talent, and treasure?

I am not worried about that. I believe that you get it. I believe that you do not work from fear. I believe that you do not bury your gifts only to end up losing them. I believe that you are the right people in the right place at the right time. I believe that you believe in your God and in your church. I believe that you cherish your God given time, talent, and treasure and that you are ready to use them for the good of the kingdom. I believe that you know that your stewardship defines you as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I believe that you know that your use of your gifts is nothing less than your expression of your relationship with God.

That is all we can do. We need not fear. We need not bury anything. We need only to fully and boldly give of ourselves as best we can for as long as we can. AMEN