

Judges 4:1-7

Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

In the course of a day, all of us take risks. Sometimes, just getting out of bed in the morning is risky business. Once the day begins, we are faced with one decision after another about how we will respond to what's been presented to us. Most of the time, we react without much thought. We simply do what needs to be done. When I look back on my years of raising children, I realize that my husband and I took lots of risks with our children. Wanting them to be able to stand on their own one day, we gradually let out the reins and let them make decisions for themselves as they were able. Sometimes we weren't around ... and we knew that one day we wouldn't be around on a daily basis ... and we felt like they needed the elbow-room to make some choices for themselves. We were fairly prudent about how much elbow-room we gave them, but every now and then, we miscalculated!

The gospel lesson that we've just heard this morning is all about trust and risk-taking. Jesus has modelled great risk-taking in his ministry and has shown his followers what he hopes they will adopt in his absence. When he tells this parable about what happens with the three slaves in the absence of their master, he is telling his followers what he wants and expects from them in his absence. He has just recently left the relative safety of Galilee to come to Jerusalem and take on the Pharisees and the Scribes in the Temple which is dangerous business for him. But it is part of his mission. It's part of his ministry. He shows his followers what courage it takes to speak truth to power and what a risk it is.

This story about the talents given to the three slaves has often been preached as one that refers to the gifts we have each been given ... the gift of public speaking or the gift of a generous heart or the gift of teaching or the gift of material resources to share. But this parable is about even more than the gifts we have been given and Jesus' encouragement to use those gifts to God's glory.

This parable is first of all about God's generosity. In first century Palestine, a talent was an enormous sum of money. It represented about 15-20 years of wages of a day laborer ... so to be given even one talent was an incredible windfall. Imagine if were given your lifetime salary all at one time. It boggles the mind!! To be given two talents or five talents was to be given more money than any one person would ever see in their lifetime. It was incredible. It was more than

abundant. It was gloriously extravagant. So first we need to consider God's abundant and extravagant gift to us in all the possibilities of life.

Secondly, we need to ponder what it is that God wants us to do with all of this extravagance. Jesus is preparing his followers for the time when he will not be with them. He's offering this story as a guideline for what we are to do with God's Word, the gift of salvation, the extravagance of the eternal life that Jesus has given us. As Christians, we believe that Jesus will, in fact, return. So what are we to do while he's gone? How are we to keep his ministry going? How are we going to expand on what has been given to us? Just like a wise parent steps back to let his children make decisions for themselves, so Jesus departs and gives his followers some much needed elbow-room to get creative decide how they will use the bounty they have been given.

God has trusted us with his Son, Jesus. He has trusted us to continue in the work that Jesus did when he walked the earth with us. God has given us abundant and eternal life through, Jesus. That's a lot of trust. Our response to that trust can't be to keep this information to ourselves ... in effect ... to bury it in the ground. What Jesus seems to be telling us is that we can't play it safe. What Jesus seems to be telling us is that we have to be willing to take some risks. Most of us were raised to be prudent which in and of itself is a good thing. Now we realize that Jesus is asking us to risk losing what we have by using what we have to spread the kingdom. We think we may lose everything in the process or we may double what we've been given by increasing the size of the kingdom by our efforts. That's what followers of Jesus are asked to do and we, as Christians, are followers of Jesus. The risk we take is not that we will lose the kingdom of God, but that we will suffer in this life as a result of trying to spread that kingdom.

So, being a Christian is risky business. We Episcopalians tend to be quite private about our faith and about our personal experiences with God ... with Jesus ... with the Holy Spirit ... and with prayer. We are traditionally very reticent about these things. We've earned the nickname "the Frozen Chosen." We don't tend to get too emotional about Jesus and if our hearts are moved or touched, we tend to keep that experience a secret rather than shout it from the rooftops.

But maybe God wants us to take a risk with all of those experiences. Maybe God wants us to shout it all from the rooftops ... to be consumed by it. Maybe God wants us to invest our hearts and our emotional lives in our experiences of faith. Maybe faith isn't just an intellectual exercise or a series of beliefs that we hold to be true. Maybe faith is supposed to be spent in our actions and in our words and in our very being. Maybe when our hearts are overflowing with the knowledge and love of God, we are supposed to share that by both word and deed.

If we invest ourselves, not just our intellect, in sharing God's love we are bound to feel spent at the end of the day. We are bound to be emotionally drained by our interactions with others. We can be guaranteed that our hearts full of the love of God will get broken by the world. Surely Jesus' heart was broken by what he experienced as a human being. He couldn't escape that and neither can we. But just as God has trusted us with the knowledge of the salvation of Jesus and the coming of the kingdom, so we need to trust God in providing for us.

But if we don't want our hearts broken, if we don't want to be emotionally drained, if we don't want to spend ourselves in carrying out and carrying on Jesus' mission on earth, we can play it safe. We can simply hang on to what we've been given and be ready to give back to God what God has given to us. We won't have squandered it. We will have been prudent which is not a bad thing to be.

But we will also have missed the point. It's not that we will be thrown into the outer darkness, it's just that by catering to our fear and indulging in self-protection we not only fail to expand on the generous gift that God has given us, but we will have prevented ourselves from using and enjoying and being enriched ourselves by this very gift. When we act out of fear....or fail to act because of fear ... we cheat ourselves out of the abundant life that God has given into our hands. Where God's abundant life is concerned, playing it safe is only to deprive ourselves of the pleasures of that abundant life.

In God's economy, there is always enough to go around. And you may have already discovered in your life that God provides little miracles here and there for each of us. We just sometimes refer to these events as being 'lucky.' Maybe luck had nothing to do with it. Maybe those 'lucky' occurrences were simply dividends on those moments when we have been willing to trust in the abundant life God has given us to use.

Taking risks is not what we tend to think of as being a prudent way to live, but in God's economy, it's the only way to live! Taking a risk is the way we demonstrate our trust in God ... not that God will double our money or that God will make a situation turn out the way we want, but our belief that God is steadfast in his relationship with us. He knows better than we the desires of our hearts. Trusting in anything that we cannot see is hard. It sometimes seems irresponsible. But trusting in God is the ultimate honor that we can pay to God. Using the abundant life God has given us is to be a partner in that relationship with God that God wants with us.

Trusting God is risky business ... but it's the only ultimate sure thing!

AMEN.