Don’t Bury your Light

Pentecost 24A

November 15, 2020

Matthew 25: 14-30 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Today we read the story of the parable of the talents, which is a popular parable but also a very challenging one. It can be hard to discern what the message is. Over time it has been interpreted that the talents are our abilities and it’s not about money at all. More recently as I read commentaries for today a number took the position that it was a statement about empire, what we now would call capitalism and the corruption of the wealthy getting richer off of the poor. The third slave resisted using the money to participate in the system by burying it, knowing the risk this was to do so, fearful of the masters’ rage. Some say that the master who gives the talents is Jesus or God, and that can be a challenge with the harsh judgement at the end and the statement that those who have, more will be given, and those who have little, all that they have will be taken away. This statement seems inconsistent with Jesus’ other messages in the gospels. It may be important to note that it is the master who says these words in the story and not Jesus after the story. I had a New Testament professor who said about parables that they are stories, not allegories. They have meaning in the context of the time and culture. People would have understood that investing and earning interest was not part of the Jewish practice of the time. It may also help to know that a talent was worth 15 years of wages, so we are talking about a crazy and unrealistic amount of money that the master was giving to the slaves. It would also have been a great risk to invest such large amounts of money as the first two slaves did.

So, if the talent was such an unbelievably valuable amount, what if we look at the talent being the divine light that is in each of us and how we share that light? God’s love is in each one of us, that is God’s light, and we are called to share it with others. When we bury our light, it can bring darkness, isolation, and pain. It can also be a great risk to put ourselves out there, and share the innermost part of ourselves or give ourselves to others, through our time and gifts we have to share. When we do, the rewards are often great. Can you think of a time when you gave of yourself, served, or helped others and you felt like you received more than you gave?

Between 2010 and 2015 I was co-chair for Camp fYrefly Regina and Chaplain when it was in Saskatoon on alternate years. Camp fYrefly was a youth leadership program for queer youth aged 14-25. Over the years of working with these youth, I experienced each camp was a gift as these youth who we were working with to provide a safe space where they could be themselves, explore who they are, and gain leadership skills, also gave me so much. I learned so much with them, from deepening my understanding of the diversity of gender and sexuality expressions, to learning about the challenges they still face, and the resilience they had. It was a gift to see them come to themselves and gain confidence over the four days of the camp. While I let my light shine and they knew I was a minister, their light shone even brighter to me.

This story of the talents, is followed by and also connects with the prophecy in the of the day of judgement and Jesus separating the people like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. This is the passage of the least of these - whenever we feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome a stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the prisoner, we do it to Jesus. Jesus is emphasizing the importance of seeing him, seeing the light of God in others, especially the least of these. When have you realized that you have been in the presence of God when you were serving or helping someone? It is another way we share our talents, our divine light.

There are many examples I can think of how we can let our talent, our divine light shine.

We share our talent of divine light when we prepare meals or give donations to those in need.

We share our talent of divine light when we call someone who may be lonely or isolated during these times.

We share our talent of divine light when we take time to be visit or call those who are sick or grieving.

We share our talent of divine light when we volunteer with organizations serving others.

We share our talent of divine light when we take on leadership roles in the church, including being members of committees.

We share our talent of divine light when we go to a protest or rally, especially if we are visible as people of faith.

We share our talent of divine light when we share our gratitude with those who have supported or served us.

We share our talent of divine light when we stand up for those who are oppressed or discriminated against.

We share our talent of divine light when we are open to hearing how we contribute to racism, sexism, homophobia, and other systems.

We all have gifts of light to share. At the core of the story it is not laziness that the parable says stops the slave from making use of the talent, it is fear. How many of us don’t share our light, our gifts, because of fear; perhaps fear that we’re not really good enough or that we might mess it up? It seems to me that some of this parable’s power is directed towards those of us with weak self-esteem; those of us who do not quite trust our ability to use the gifts we have.

The messages before this parable have been about time, being prepared, and using your wisdom to serve others. This guides us for this story as well. We need to use our time and talents well, be bold and take risks, for we don’t know when we will experience the Christ. There were a few questions raised for your reflection in this message, and I invite you if you plan to stay for the fellowship time following the service to take time to reflect on one or two of these questions. We will share them again then:

Can you think of a time when you gave of yourself, served, or helped others and you felt like you received more than you gave?

When have you realized that you have been in the presence of God when you were serving or helping someone?

What fears keep you from sharing your light/your talent?

May we find the courage to take the risks to share our light with others, and be open to experiencing God’s light from and through others as we continue to move through this time together.