

Sermon 15 November 2020 Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

This parable is always known as the Parable of the Talents, but the modern translation refers to money rather than talents. However, the message is really about the talents and gifts we have and how we use them.

The talent was not a coin, it was a weight; and therefore, its value obviously depended on whether the coin was copper, silver or gold. In this translation, it is gold.

As was so often the case, much of what Jesus had to say was directed at the Pharisees. In this case, the useless servant represents the Scribes and the Pharisees, and their attitude to the Law. The useless servant buried his gold in the ground, in order that he might hand it back to his master exactly as it was. The whole aim of the Scribes and Pharisees was to keep the Law exactly as it was. Any change, any development, anything new was to them anathema. Jesus is condemning them for this. You cannot grow without change, without being a little adventurous.

But there is much more to the parable than that. It tells us that God has given us differing gifts. One servant received five bags of gold, one received two bags of gold and the other received one. The important thing is this – it's not about what talents or gifts we have been given, it is about what we do with what we have got. People are not equal in talent but we are all equal in effort. And the point is this, if we all contribute in any way we can, even if it is in quite a small way, then we can make a difference. Let me recount a well-known story about the stone soup.

Many years ago three soldiers, hungry and weary, came upon a small village. The villagers, suffering a meagre harvest and the many years of war, quickly hid what little they had to eat and met the three soldiers in the village square, wringing their hands and bemoaning the lack of anything to eat.

The soldiers spoke quietly amongst themselves and then the first soldier turned to the village elders, "Your tired fields have left nothing you nothing to share, so we will share what little we have – the secret of how to make soup from stones."

Naturally, the villagers were intrigued and soon a fire was lit and the village's largest pot put over it. The soldiers then dropped a 3 smooth stones. 'Now this will be a fine soup,' said the second soldier, 'but a pinch of salt and some parsley would make it wonderful.' Up jumped a villager, 'What luck! I've just remembered where some's been left.' And off she ran, returning with a bunch of parsley and a turnip. As the pot boiled on, the memory of the villagers improved. Soon barley, carrots, beef and cream had found their way into the big pot, and someone even came up with a cask of wine. And so everyone sat down to a veritable feast.

They ate, danced and sang well into the night. In the morning the three soldiers awoke to find the entire village standing before them. At their feet lay a satchel with gifts of food. 'You have given us the greatest gift of all – the secret of how to make stone soup,' said one of the elders, 'and we shall never forget.' The third soldier turned to the crowd and said, 'It is no secret, but this is certain: it is only by sharing what we have, no matter how small that might be, that we make a feast.' And off the soldiers wandered, down the road.

These soldiers had opened the villagers' eyes to something that is critical if a community, in our case, our church, is to grow and prosper. John Perkins, a devout Christian and a trailblazer in the civil rights movement, in his book, *Dream with Me*, talks of Redistribution. He talks of Redistribution in two senses – the redistribution of wealth and of talents. Yes, we must give what we can afford financially, but equally importantly, we must give of whatever talents we might have.

We might have a talent for IT, for singing, for hospitality. Whatever that talent might be, we have a duty to both God and our community to use that talent for God and church. Let me give you a quote from Acts 4:32-33. 'All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had. And through this the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great favour was upon them all.'

I have to say we are very fortunate with regards our church community in this regard, but it is important we keep reminding ourselves of the need to share in any way we can if we are to continue to build a flourishing church.

I will finish with a quote from Leonard Nimoy, the actor who played Spock in the Star Trek franchise, 'The miracle is this, the more we share, the more we have.'

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