Sermon 15 November 2026 Parable of the Talents

Acts 4:32-35 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 depended on whether the talent 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. Sound familiar?! 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 anathema to them. Jesus is condemning them for this. You cannot grow without change, without being a little adventurous.

But where do we fit into this parable? There is actually much more to the parable than a condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees. 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 one received one. The important thing is this – it's not about what talents of gifts we have been given, it is about what we do with what we have been given; it is about what we do with what we have got. People are not equal in talent but we can all be equal in effort. And the point is this, if we all contribute in any way we can, even if it is in a small way, then we can make a difference. Let me recount a well-known story about the making of 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 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 three smooth stones into the pot. 'Now this will be fine soup', said one of the soldiers, 'but a pinch of salt and some parsley would make it wonderful.' Up jumped one of the villagers. '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, the memory of the villagers improved. Soon barley, carrots, beef and cream had found their way into the bog pot, and someone even came up with a cask of wine. Ands so everyone sat down to a veritable feast.

They ate, danced and sang well into the night. In the morning, the soldiers awoke to find the entire village standing before them. At their feet lay a satchel with gifts of food. 'You've given us the greatest gift of all – the secret of how to make stone soup, 'said one of the elders, 'and we will never forget.' One of the soldiers turned to the crowd and said, 'It is no secret, but this is certain: it is only in 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 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 church. Let me quote from our first reading from Acts: *'All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.'* Acts 4:32.

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. This is what God expects of us and this is what we need to do if we are to align ourselves with God. I quote from Hebrews 13:16, *'Don't forget to do good and share what you have with others, for such sacrifices are very pleasing to God.'*

This verse is very interesting. The traditional way of making sacrifices to God was through the sacrificing of animals in the Temple. With the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, this was no longer possible. What this writer is saying, remembering we are not too sure who actually wrote the Letter to Hebrews, is that making any sort of sacrifice in extending a helping hand to others is actually the sort of sacrifice that is most pleasing to God.

Remember this, when we give to others, however we might give, we are giving to God because God dwells within each and every one of us. I remind you of that wonderful verse; Matthew 25:40, *'Jesus said, "I assure you, when you did it for one the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did for me.'* I believe that is one of the most revealing and instructional verses in the Bible.

It is about being obedient to God. We talked about that last week in the story of the man who was told by God to push every day against the boulder. He obeyed and became a different person, in a very positive way.

It is about faith in action. If we truly believe in the reality and veracity of God, then we must do everything we can to carry out his wishes, to fulfil his expectations, and as the writer of Hebrews put it, to please him. It is surely superfluous for me to say that in any relationship, we want to do our very best to please whomsoever we are in a relationship with. God is no different.

Going back to the Parable of the Talents, and for the purpose of this message, let's translate the word 'talent' as we understand it today, as 'ability.' We all have the ability to be kind and generous, so let's use that ability and in the process, we please God. I don't know about you, but I certainly want to do everything I can to be in his good books. Not only is it rewarding, but the alternative doesn't bear thinking about!

I finish with a very pertinent quote from Nick Vujicic, Australian evangelist, *'You and I were put on this earth to serve something greater than our narrow interests… Our God-given talents are meant to benefit others. When we use them for that greater purpose, we put faith into practice.'*