

Proper 28A 2014

Today we should remember something that all of us sometimes forget – that what God requires of us is not success, but faithfulness.

The gospel we just heard is “The Parable of the Talents.” That word “talent” has a double meaning. Its original meaning in the New Testament refers to a huge sum of money. In the ancient world, a talent was what an ordinary laborer earned over the course of 15 years. Thus, giving each of his servants one or more talents, the master is entrusting them with a fortune.

From this story comes our meaning of a talent as an ability or skill.

But the Parable isn't really about money or ability. It's about something even more important. It's about trust.

The master trusts these servants. The punch line says it just right. “You have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

Jesus is teaching us that acting out of trust, rather than fear, produces results.

The story tells us that the worst thing is not losing out. The worst thing is never risking. In the eyes of God, the fear that keeps a treasure in the ground is a great lack of faith, trust and hope. When we put that treasure at risk – which may even result in its loss – that is proof of faith.

You see, we can learn as much from our failures as our successes. It is failure that provides the most indelible lessons. But fear, ah! that teaches us nothing – until we leave it behind.

The French scientist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin sums it up nicely in his book *“The Divine Milieu.”* He writes: “God obviously has no need of the products of your busy activity since he could give himself everything without you. The only thing that concerns him, the only thing he desires intensely, is your faithful use of your freedom and the preference you accord him over the things around you. Try to grasp this: the things that are given to you on earth are given to you purely as an exercise, a ‘blank sheet’ on which you make your own mind and heart. You are on a testing ground where God can judge whether you are capable of being translated to heaven and into his presence. You are on trial so that it matters very little what becomes of the fruits of the earth, or what they are worth. The whole question is whether you have learned how to obey and how to love.”

The Parable of the Talents is not really about money or abilities. It's a story about trust, a story about risk. Life is the same way. What turns out to be important is not money or abilities in themselves, but our decision to use them in ways that show our willingness to risk and to trust.

What God has given us – our selves, our lives, our faith, our abilities, our gifts, our possessions – is given in order to be spent and put into circulation, in order to be the source of further blessings for others and for ourselves.

Use our talents well and good things happen, including amazing growth - in us, as well as in the Reign of God. Bury them, leave them un-exercised, and we end up out in the cold.

God's gifts are similarly given to us to be risked in new ventures in God's service. Every new step in living for God is a risk.

When we are called to account, the question will not be how it is that we preserved the balance sheet or the bricks and mortar, but whether we emulated others' daring and doubled it, taking audacious action to preserve principle over principal.

Those who trust in God's generosity find more and more of that generosity.

Courage and generosity and good stewardship of our resources are all part of the picture, but the big picture is one of a transformed life, as individuals and as a church.

The lesson we can learn from the story about money and loans is to put our gifts into circulation. This parable, Richard Bauckham writes, "compares the use of all God has given one...in God's service, with the use of a financial loan in order to make a profit for the investor." If we hoard and hide our talents, gifts, and possessions, they don't do what they are supposed to do.

We are here at Trinity to journey in faith towards a life fully lived. We are followers of Jesus who understand that a faithful life follows Jesus no matter what may lie ahead.
AMEN.