

November 16, 2014

Matthew 25: 14-30

“It’s also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities.

To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left.

Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master’s investment. The second did the same.

But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master’s money.

“After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them.

The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment.

His master commended him: ‘Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.’

“The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master’s investment.

His master commended him: ‘Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.’

“The servant given one thousand said, ‘Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error.

I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.’

“The master was furious. ‘That’s a terrible way to live! It’s criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least?

The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.

“Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this “play-it-safe” who won’t go out on a limb.

Throw him out into utter darkness.’

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – “Managing money faithfully”

There are people who spend all their days researching churches. The Barna Group and the Pew Research are the 2 big ones, both in the US. They have done many studies of the dynamics of churches and have come to one clear conclusion from all those studies and that is that when a church goes into survival mode, it is on the fast track to dying. The survival mode is when a church stops looking outward, they only want to keep the doors open. So they don't do anything different, they try to just maintain what they've got. They get tighter and tighter and tighter. Churches that are in survival mode don't look at their buildings. They generally don't look at what's going on in the community. They tend not to have activities of the community coming into their building. They're not welcoming of new people. I remember when I was doing my doctoral research, I was out in a small town on the outskirts of Calgary and it was a community that had grown hugely with commuters to Calgary, but the church had stayed very, very small. And one of the long-time members said, “We want new people.” The school principal was there, who was a new-comer, who had felt unwelcomed and he said, “But we want them to be like us.” “We've always done things that way.” These are the kinds of catch-phrases for survivalism. Now the opposite is true for churches that grow, churches that look beyond the present to the future, churches that make room for new people, different people, churches that respond to community needs and not just their own, those are the churches that will thrive. Like us. In the greater scheme of things, this is a church that is thriving. It's about having the courage, being prepared to take risks; it's about sharing leadership not hoarding power. How often I have heard my colleagues refer to the 'royal family' of their congregation. You know the people, if they don't agree with it, nothing's going to happen. Churches that do well don't squander their blessings and that's the message of the parable. Don't get your knickers in a knot about how the master seems to condemn the guy that buries the money; About Jesus seeming to promote judge mentalism, punishment and all the rest. If you get on that track you'll have missed this message about the parable. What the parable of the talents is about is noticing, please, that you are showered with blessings in life; every one of us is showered with blessings, just like that wonderful old hymn. Windsor Park United Church in my experience is a veritable tropical storm of blessings... have you noticed how someone has an idea and then the next thing you know we are doing it? When I came here my first year and said, “Gee we should have a chili supper to kick-off Advent.”

“We’ll we’ve never done that before. Will anyone come?” Have any of you been here for the Advent Chili Supper kick-off in the last 17 years, we average 135 people. We have chili, we go outside around a bonfire and Laura makes sure we all sing Christmas carols, people drive by and slow down and watch us and on snowy angels we’ve made snow angels across the lawn and we come in a read stories and decorate cookies and Santa comes and we remember how very blessed we are. That’s just one of hundreds of things that have happened in my time here.

Don’t read the parable as a parable of judgment; instead, it’s a plea to grow this faith of ours and to grow all the life-sustaining values attached to it. Janet Hunt, who writes a wonderful blog called ‘Dancing with the Word’. She is a Lutheran pastor in Northern Illinois, says, like these 3 slaves, God has richly blessed us in a thousand ways. Indeed our bushel baskets are so full we cannot lift them on our own. God has given us all of it and asks only that we use it, invest it, spend it, grow it. God has given it all to us and asks only that we love and trust him enough not to sit on it, hide it or bury it. So what are we waiting for, what are we afraid of, let’s just do it. Baby’s baptized, all these renovations completed, every last bit of it paid for; and a Praise Team, someone who could lead this church in their 20’s, a Cookie Walk, where you need football equipment to protect yourself from the crowds; A spaghetti lunch for West Broadway Community Ministry the other day; wheeling folks to the chapel at Riverview and it goes on and on and on what happens in and through this place, they are indeed, just as Jesus told that parable so long ago signs of blessings and courage. **AMEN**