

A Sermon for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, November 15, 2020

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*Jesus said, "It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"*  
*Matthew 25:14-30*

What would you do if you won the lottery? What would you do if you unexpectedly received a great inheritance from a distant relative you didn't know you had? Sometimes we sit around and dream about our answer to questions like that. Maybe we would quit our jobs, give away some of it, pay off loans, buy a new house or car for a family member or friend in need. Maybe we'd invest some, save some, travel the world. Maybe we would even give a portion of it to church, or back to God in some way.

How many of us would bury the cold hard cash in the backyard? That would be an outrageous thing to do, don't you agree? Money is great in and of itself, but it has no value until you employ it. It's wise to want some return on our investment, is it not? We talked about this at Vestry just this week.

November is stewardship season at Christ and Grace, and my hope is that you know we won't bury our money in the ground. We are careful to spend it wisely in ways that glorify God and do the work of the kingdom. Being good caretakers of all that God has given to us, all that God has entrusted to us, is about so much more than money itself. It's about what we decide to do with all that we have been entrusted by God.

We have been given so much more than money. God has invested lavishly in us. We have been given the Gospel, the good news. We have been given God's very self in the life of Jesus – the ultimate expression of God's love for us. And each of us has been given unique gifts because we are made in God's image. This is winning the lottery! This is receiving the most amazing inheritance!

As I have thought about what God entrusts to us and the investment, the trust, that God has placed in us, I have come to see that generosity and faithfulness and sharing the gospel are all connected. When we are passionate about something we can't help but talk about it and share it, can't help but want to be involved in it, and we become brave about living into it. What we do matters. What we do shows others our faith and reveals Christ to others.

Being a good steward, that is, generously sharing what God has given us, is not only about money. If you have seen all of the outreach opportunities listed in our eNews each week, seen all the ways we have helped our community this week alone, you will know that we are indeed sharing our faith and our possessions to reveal Christ in the world.

Today's Gospel, the parable of the talents, is really a story about the way three people react to winning the lottery. The first two are so overjoyed that they cannot contain the good news and they invest their winnings, we aren't told how, but they go off at once and do amazing things. They are trustworthy. But the third one lives in fear and we wonder if he really knows God at all because he dug a hole and hid what had been entrusted to him. He buried it. Buried treasure is no good to anyone until it has been found. Buried treasure is not meant to stay buried.

Jesus tells this story to his disciples knowing that he is about to leave them, knowing they will soon be the bearers of the good news of the kingdom following his death and resurrection. Jesus knows they are going to be grieving, they are going to be afraid, and they are going to feel overwhelmed with all that is being entrusted to them. They are going to think they don't have the gifts needed, that they are inadequate to the task. They do not yet know about buried treasure; they do not yet know that Jesus will be buried and then be raised! The disciples were being given the work of investing their gifts; entrusted to be the caretakers of this Word from God, this promise of new and unending life in Christ!

As Christians following the way of Jesus, we too are caretakers. We too have been entrusted with the Word from God, with the amazing promise of new life in Christ. How are we doing with that? Are we being trustworthy? Or are we at times choosing instead to bury what we have been given, rather than investing it in the work of the kingdom?

The third servant in the parable lived his life in fear, unable to be brave and take risks. If we see the master in this parable as God (and that's just one interpretation), we see two very different descriptions of God. It's helpful to know that the angry reaction of the master in this parable is hyperbole, that is, it is an exaggeration used to make a point in the story, the point that sharing the good news would be imperative work for the disciples. Perhaps if the third servant had been more trusting and generous, he would have come to know that God is just that – trustworthy and generous. But instead, in his fear, he buried his gifts and his future by not investing in the kingdom.

What might that look like in our lives, burying what has been entrusted to us? Do we blame others when we know we have not lived up to our potential? Perhaps we procrastinate, make up excuses, don't think it's important. Maybe we fear letting go of what is comfortable and safe. Do we live our lives with a mindset of scarcity or abundance? How we live our lives is the most powerful witness we can make to the love of God. Investing our money in the bank is a good thing, but as Christians, investing in the work of the Kingdom will bring even greater dividends.

So, what are we doing in our lives that points others to the kingdom? And what are we doing at Christ and Grace that is a witness in our community? I would say we are doing some pretty amazing things. We have fed lunch to the hungry at the Hope Center last week and will do so again this week. We are collecting shoes for an Eagle Scout project to help others in need. We collected clothing yesterday for the area homeless. We will donate Thanksgiving and Christmas meals and provide Christmas to children and seniors thanks to your faith-filled generosity.

Some things do require money, and we are grateful that you prayerfully consider what you can give. But what you do to share your time and talent is equally important. Any of us can offer our gifts (yes, you all have them) to create children's Sunday videos, help with an outreach project, or serve in a worship ministry. These are investments in the kingdom. Most of what we do to share the love of God only requires us to trust God more than we fear failure, to give because we are grateful for all we have been given, and to share the stories of ways we see God at work in our lives.

Because here is the good news – we have already won the lottery; we have already inherited everything. Let's stop digging holes of fear and inadequacy and wisely invest all that has been entrusted to us. Let's share our faith in every small act of kindness and generosity. Because the rate of return is eternally abundant. Amen.