

The Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:14-30

It's really quite simple. What are you doing with what you have been given? In today's parable Jesus is calling out to us to ask "what are you squandering?"

This week, I was invited to a grand opening of St. Mark's Place in Kitchener. St. Marks Lutheran Church merged in the last four years with two other churches in Waterloo. Both numbers at all three parishes were dwindling and the St. Marks building was in disrepair. Pastor Sue and I were the last couple to be married there. Prior to the merger St. Marks spoke with Indwell a Church redevelopment agency. In the end the building was sold to them to create 43 low-income housing units and still maintain a community meeting place. This building probably could have been sold to a developer for a huge price but instead the people of St. Marks chose to invest in people providing low-income housing. This is a great project.

Now I have a rhetorical question, "was this project done for the sake of the people of St. Marks or for the kingdom of heaven?"

The parable of the talents tells us of a master who entrusts talents or money, to three individuals. To the first he gives 5, the second he gives 2, the last he gives one. The first two take a risk. They go and invest what they have been given. They come back with double the money. The last servant digs a hole and buries his talent for safe keeping. When the master comes back from his journey to collect his money he finds the first two servants have doubled their money. He tells them, "Well done...enter into the joy of your master." The last servant when talking to the master said, "I was afraid

so I hid your talent.” The master goes a little ballistic and casts him into the outerdarkness.

Rick Lischerin his commentary wonders, “What if the first two servants came forward and said to the master, “Master, we have good news and we have bad news. The good news is we boldly took the money you gave us and invested it. The bad news is we invested in companies that went belly up, bankrupt and we lost everything. There is nothing left. It is gone.”

Would the master have gone ballistic because of the loss? I think if that had happened, if they had lost everything, I believe that this master who had risked everything he had on these servants, would have said, “Well done, good and faithful servants. Enter into the joy of your master.”

The point of this story is not results but risks.

The parable of the talents is not given to us to inspire us individually to live our faith. It is given to us to be an example of how to live life collectively for the benefit of the kingdom of heaven. When you think about it the Sermon on the Mount should come to mind. What you and I should do with what we have been given is never, ever, for our benefit alone, but for the sake of the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness so that we might embody Immanuel – being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Still, it has to make you wonder...must such risky responsibility-taking be a component of faithful living? I suppose we are not all taught to believe that. Some of us have been led to think that faithfulness and being a good Christian simply amounts to avoiding what is immoral or sinful. It amounts to heeding all the prohibitions and negative rules like "Don't do this," "Don't do that." But when you think a bit about how Jesus teaches those who will take up his cross and follow his path, there isn't so very much said about what not to do. Instead, Jesus has a great deal to say about what must be done in his name: Take my yoke. Follow me. Ask, seek, knock. Feed my sheep. Watch and pray. Let your light shine. Love one another.

The parable of the talents is calling us to talk about difficult subjects, helping hurting people and doing what is just.

We just finished having a discussion over many weeks about possibly hosting a warming shelter in the church basement. I was disappointed that it was not more favorably supported. That is the way things go sometimes. What was just as important though was this: a really good discussion opened up about the homelessness problem in Pembroke. Trust me the discussion is not over. I am committed to discussing how it is we can continue to support the centre. It is so mysterious how God works sometimes. The same time the church council met and decided not to host the shelter, the city of Pembroke finally decided to do something. They have decided to support the homeless and keep them out of the cold this winter by allocating \$100 000 for this

project. The Pembroke Area Community Taskforce already has a plan in place. Thanks be to God.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is calling us to work for the betterment of the kingdom. God wants us to speak out against injustices and the use of scripture to justify those wrongs. What do I mean? We need to call out any use of scripture that sanctions discrimination.

We need to continue to resist so-called Biblical interpretations that have so corrupted Scripture. That is to speak against those who overlook or ignore God's intention to love, to free the oppressed, to care for the rejected, to uplift the marginalized.

I will continue to (and I challenge you to do so) speak out against sexism and racism, to speak up for LGBTQIA+ persons, and speak into those places and spaces, those systems and organizations (including the church), those moments and events where the righteousness of God is supplanted by self-righteous justification.

The risk factors, the faith factors that make any kind of public profession of commitments and beliefs are profound these days — for all of us.

At the end of the day, judgment in this parable means an acute awareness of God. An awareness of God's presence. An awareness of God's promise to God's creation. An awareness of God's justice. An awareness of God's insistence that a commitment to being the salt of the earth and the light of the world really, really

matters. It means believing that God meant it when God called you. Entrustment is the very gift itself. I leave you with this question: "What are you willing to risk for the sake of the gospel? Amen.