

**Episcopal Church**

**November 19, 2023**

**Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost:**

**Proper 28 (A)**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish**

**DRAFT**

**“Are We Being Too Careful**

**with What We Have?**

**The Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30**

Jesus said, “For 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.””

Lord, help us to invest our talents wisely in your service so that we may

find blessedness and healing for ourselves and for others. Amen.

“Scholars estimate the value of a talent variously. A talent was first a measure of weight—‘the heaviest weight in the Hebrew system. The talent was used to weigh gold (2 Samuel 12:30), silver (1 Kings 20:39), iron (1 Chronicles 29:7), bronze (Exodus 38:29) and many other commodities. The common talent weighed about 3000 shekels or the full weight that a man could carry (2 Kings 5:23)’ (Lockyer, Page 1096).

“In time, a talent came to mean a certain sum of money —probably 6,000 denarii. In the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, we learned that a denarius was a day's wage for a common laborer (Matthew 20:2). One talent, 6,000 denarii, would therefore represent earnings for 1,000 six-day workweeks (or 19+ years) for the common man.”

-Dick Donovan in SermonWriter

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/matthew-2514-30>

[www.beckettandco.co.uk/manual-handling-faq-weight/](http://www.beckettandco.co.uk/manual-handling-faq-weight/)

The average man is able to lift about 50 pounds, the average woman can lift about thirty pounds. Converting the weight of gold represented by a talent, for men that would be about a million dollars worth of gold, about two standard size gold bars, and about 600,000 dollars worth of gold for a woman. Fifty pounds is the maximum weight of a suitcase one can check at the airport, so we have an idea of about how much gold with which the servants were entrusted in today's



parable of the talents. Of course, we often view this parable in terms of ‘attributes’ rather than talents of gold, but the idea of gaining more gold seems in some ways to translate better in terms of gold rather than in attribute talents.

How one can double the number of talents one has is a bit of a brain-teaser; maybe if one knows three languages one could learn three more? Of if one could play the piano, the violin, and the trumpet, one could also learn the bass, the trombone, and the organ. So there are some ways of translating today’s

parable in terms of physical or mental abilities. But do we think Jesus is speaking about physical or mental abilities, or actual gold, or maybe both, or neither? The parable does not tell us. The ‘burying’ of a talent in the ground is perhaps more translatable in terms of monetary value, since the master tells the unworthy servant: “you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest”. But since we usually think Jesus is speaking of ways the kingdom of God can be

expanded on earth, then we are challenged with how we use our talents, physical, mental, social, and so on, to grow the kingdom of God on earth. In other words, how do we use our God-given talents to bring in people to church? to be very specific about it. In my old church we grew from about an average of 28 to 123 on a Sunday, almost a five-fold increase. So apparently we did invest our talents wisely. But physical, and mental, and spiritual talents go only so far, but monetary talents are absolutely crucial in growing a

congregation. Without funds, rarely can a church thrive, or even survive. This becomes a barrier for us if we are stewards, or stewardship workers. We need funds to grow our church.

Sometimes people seem to think that if we could just get in more people, the funds would grow accordingly; however, rarely does that work. The new people usually do not give anywhere near the percentage giving of the existing parishioners, but maybe a quarter to a fifth as much. That is what some call a 'generation' gap, but it is more of the

effects of the new versus the experienced. A new person rarely grasps the value of church as much as those who have been faithful members and attenders. It takes time to see God's favor lavished on us when we take God seriously and take to heart our faith in Jesus Christ.

I was a part of a diocesan Stewardship Commission, and we used for several years a guideline of 'steps' in increasing our pledge base. A 'step' is a half a percent. If one is giving two percent of their income to the church, a 'step up'

would be to increase one's giving to two and a half percent. On average, if a church adopts a 'step up' campaign, the church usually finds their pledges increase between ten and twenty percent in the first year--pretty good, isn't it? But the second year, the increases are about half that, and the third year about half of the second year in terms of increase. So a formula of say 15 percent in the first year of a 'step up' campaign would be followed by a 7 or 8 percent increase in the second year, and a 3 or 4 percent in Year Three. But without a

‘step up’ campaign, which normally includes a restaurant catered dinner at the end, pledges usually stay pretty much the same. Yet in three years of ‘step up’ pledging, the overall pledges often have increased between eighteen and twenty-five percent.

One key feature of a ‘step up’ campaign is that the focus is on one’s thanksgiving and gratefulness for the things one has been given by God. Church budgets never enter into the discussion at any point. If we give God the glory, we also need to give God the

gold, to put it a bit bluntly. The average Episcopalian usually gives about 2.3 percent of their gross income per year; so one can figure out if one is 'average' or above or below average that way. And a step up would be about a twenty percent increase in one's pledge, on average that is. One would go from giving 2.3 percent to 2.8 percent. For a total gross income of thirty thousand a year, zero point five percent would be 1,500 dollars, about 125 dollars more per month or about 30 dollars more per week, to be very specific. So one can



decide on how much one is giving already and try to up that by a half a percent. That would give even a very small church approximately six thousand dollars more income per year--not insignificant, is it? So proportional giving is encouraged. One needs first to calculate what percentage one gives each year. Then calculate giving about ten to twenty percent more next year.

Another thing we did was to do both a capital campaign and a pledge campaign at the same time. People would give more in terms of a one-time gift to a

capital campaign, but because of the nature our feelings of gratitude, we often can extend a capital campaign to three to five years. Each year one would be encouraged to contribute towards capital expenditures the same percentage each year as opposed to increased percentages. But a capital campaign does need a specific use for those funds—such as a new roof, or a new heating and cooling system, plexiglas coverings over stained glass windows, improved bathrooms, and so on.

So believe it or not, today Jesus is speaking to people who over the course of their lives will earn a million or so dollars. The average US wage earner will probably be in that range over the course of their earning lives.

In addition to monetary gifts, we are encouraged to give gifts of our other talents: to speak kindly to those outside the church to help bring them in; to befriend those who are seeking companionship and friendship to help them find that inside our church community. And the bottom line is

making and growing disciples. Too often we think only about baptisms and confirmations as being the marks of a growing church; but in reality, how we use all of our God-given gifts to grow the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven is what matters. As we become and make disciples, we will find God's favor flow upon us now and at our end.

Amen.

“Are We Being Too Careful with What  
We Have?”

DRAFT

November 19, 2023

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 28 (A)

The Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

Description:

Stewardship begins with a change of  
heart--becoming aware of how we are  
already very blessed by God.

Tags:

Jesus, Christ, God, talents, gold, men,  
women, community, disciples, grow,  
church, capital, campaign, stewardship

**St. John's Episcopal Church**

**Elizabeth, New Jersey**

**Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost:**

**Proper 28 (A)**

**November 14, 1999**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish**

**DRAFT**

**The Gospel: Matthew 25:14-15, 19-29**

Jesus said, “For 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. 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.’’

One of the key ways we find healing is by being thankful for what wholeness we already have. A young boy with cerebral palsy decided he could play soccer with the other children. He would use a specially constructed sleigh or sled-like device on the soccer field that would support his weight and that he could push around with his weakened legs that

were in braces. Someone in the town tried to ban him from playing soccer, saying the boy's contraption would be harmful to the other children. However, when one saw the video of the young child playing with his classmates, it was clear that the small sled he was using was well designed to have no sharp edges or protrusions. And it was quite unlikely to harm anyone. The judge ordered the boy to be allowed to resume his soccer. The boy was not expecting to have completely healed legs in order to play soccer. He was simply using the

legs he had, ignoring the fact that both his legs were in braces. He was thankful for what he had and put it to use.

A young girl wandered into the electric transformer hut near her apartment complex when the door was left unlocked. Her parents responded to the cries of other children who said something had happened to her. When they arrived at the electrical hut, they found her arms terribly burned, no skin left on her hands, and rushed her to the hospital. Her chances of survival were slim to none, the doctors thought. But

survive she did. Both her arms had to be amputated at the shoulder, but she was otherwise intact. So she grew up with no arms. Her mother taught her to do many things with her feet. By constantly encouraging her, she got her daughter to overcome the depressions she would suffer from time to time. The little girl was different, and she felt different. But with the constant practice of using her feet to do what her hands once could do, she began to live a life of independence. Her feet developed amazing capacities to grasp and to hold. Her toes became as

agile as her fingers once were. And in time she even learned to drive using her legs and feet and toes. The amazing 20/20 television news report last week showed her living a wonderfully alive life. She would casually go to the grocery store with her young son. With ease she was able to pick up all sorts of groceries off the shelves by standing on one leg. Then she would lift the other leg high enough to remove items from almost any grocery shelf using her toes. She had over the years developed amazing capabilities. Her mother had

been a catalyst for her self-development, but finally she herself took charge of her life and lived it to the fullest. She had learned the attitude of gratitude, her dreariness had been replaced by cheerfulness.

Haven't you noticed how your frame of mind, your mindset, can allow you to do what you otherwise would not be able to do? We tend to live limited lives when we choose to. I once knew two sisters that decided never to leave their home. They lived inside for years, until one sister became ill and died. The other

one finally came outside, but her immune system could not take the strain, and she too died very quickly. She had not gradually acclimated to the outside world. Her long years of a cloistered life would be her final downfall. She had not invested the abilities nor used the opportunities she had been presented with. And suddenly it was too late.

Where are we along this continuum? Have we been down and depressed about something and are feeling incapacitated by pain or grief or guilt? Healing begins with joy. Joy begins with trust. And



trust begins with faith. Few people ever were healed by Jesus without some sort of faith in evidence. It may have been the faith of family or friends. Recall the centurion's son that was healed simply because his father told Jesus just to say the word and he would be healed. Jesus' physical presence was not needed. The presence of faith replaced the presence of person. Maybe we are praying for someone at a distance today, someone who could not come out or be with us this morning--no problem. The Spirit of Jesus can heal at any distance at any

time. If are bringing the concerns of a loved one to the altar of God, first pray for forgiveness for our own sins, be reconciled with God, and then present yourself at the altar. Let God use our faith for our loved one.

The amount of faith is not important. Even a little faith can move mountains, Jesus told us. Only trust in the God who make the heavens and the earth and all humankind. What God has made God can surely heal.

Each slave in today's parable got at least \$300,000 to half a million dollars.

One slave got five times that, one got two times that, one got the half million. The latter one stuck his half million into the ground. However, unlike seeds, gold cannot sprout. Gold does not grow when buried. Gold simply sits there. The other two slaves industriously used their treasures and in time doubled them. The master upon returning rewarded the two wise slaves, but seized the assets of the one who had buried his.

Have we buried some God-given talent? Or are we using the gifts God has given us? Have we been confined to the

prison of fear about developing some gift we know we have? How can we break out of the confines of anxiety and neurosis about what God has created within us? Ask God to heal that shortcoming in our lives. Ask God to help us live the abundant life God has promised all believers. Jesus said, “I have come to bring life with abundance.” Be positive about what God has given you. Look up and live!

I volunteered in a homeless shelter over a period of time several years ago. One of the constant residents of the

shelter had been a ship's mechanic for several years. He had lost his job some time before. When I offered to help him find a job that would get him back on his feet, he refused to work for anything less than seventeen dollars an hour. As a result he was trapped in his adamancy of earning a high rate of pay when he simply needed to get back to a basic survival economy. And he had to live in that shelter longer than anyone else because he could never find a way to independence.

Most of the prisons in our life are self-imposed. We rely on our own understanding instead of God's will for our lives. We become truncated in our efforts because we will not let God open the doors for us. We tend to want too much too soon, and get too little too late. And that causes anxiety and stress.

There is the story of the man in the flood who first was offered a way out of his predicament by someone in a boat. Then a helicopter came to pluck him from the peak of his chimney as the flood waters rose. But he steadfastly

refused all help, saying, “I have prayed to God, and God will help.” Finally he was swept under by the flood. At heaven's gate he complained to God, “God, where were you in my need?” And God replied, “Well, I sent you a boat and a helicopter, but you refused to get on board.”

Today let us get on board. God's healing presence is here with us right now, right here. Come forward in a few moments and pray with us to break the logjams of your life. Pray with us for the shackles of unbelief to fall away. Pray

with us for someone at a distance, maybe far away. But come up in a few minutes, and let us offer our prayers to God together.

The miracles will never cease for those who invest themselves with the joy of faith.

Amen.

[A prayer from the past: We bid your prayers for Winnie who is in Intensive Care in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast, Northern Ireland. She was struck by a car as she left the Sunday



evening church service on November 7 at St. Lurach's Anglican Church in Maghera. She is on a ventilator and opened her eyes for the first time Friday evening. Winnie was the Senior Warden of the church and is in her early 60's with three grown children. Her husband, the former Treasurer of the church, passed away four years ago due to a brain tumor. Her Rector had come to the US for a special preaching mission last Sunday. He was to have been our guest preacher for a healing mission with us today, along with one of his lay leaders.

Derek's spouse Tricia witnessed the accident from a few feet away. But due to this sudden emergency they had to return to the parish. Messages may be addressed c/o the Rector, 20 Church Street, The Rectory, Maghera, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland BT46 5ED. Prayers are also asked for the 18-year old who was driving the car and said he did not see her crossing the road on foot.] [Here is the amazing outcome: Winnie completely recovered; the boy who accidentally struck her in the dark was exonerated without repercussions.

And the world wide prayer team of  
100,000 for peace founded through St.  
Ann's Anglican Cathedral in Belfast by  
Anglican priest (Franciscan) Brother  
David and a Roman Catholic nun  
successfully brought a lasting peace  
between the Roman Catholics and the  
other residents of Northern Ireland.  
Praise be to God.]