

## **“OUR HOPE FOR YEARS TO COME”**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

**November 7, 2010**

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The more I read the Bible, the more respect I develop for Jesus as a teacher, how he moves from a sneaky subtlety in some instances to hitting us over the head with a two-by-four at other times. This morning's gospel reading—the Parable of the Talents—is of the two-by-four variety. How many of you, hearing Kyle read the story this morning, find yourself feeling sorry for the servant who was given one talent and hid it in the ground because he was afraid of disappointing the master by risking and losing it? His punishment is so severe, we, most of us, want to make excuses on his behalf. Right? Was what he did so terribly wrong? Why was it so wrong? The punishment seems severe for the crime. What is Jesus trying to tell us here?

Well, let me ask you this? That talent buried in the ground: what purpose did it serve? What good did it create? How did it benefit the community, the master, or for that matter, the servant. It didn't, not in any way. That talent was as useless as if it did not exist at all. And that's the point. That's the “crime” that the parable tells us Christ's disciples are to avoid.

God has blessed each of us with gifts—talents both financial and personal—but for whatever measure God has given us, we need to know that we are merely the custodians, the stewards of what is ours. It is given to us to be shared, to be put out in the world so it might be multiplied, not kept to ourselves, not hoarded, not buried in the ground, because to refuse to use our gifts is in a significant way to deny our responsibility for them, and in denying that responsibility, we deny our God who gave them to us.

But what if we don't have a lot to begin with? It's uncanny how quickly bible study students move to pointing out that the servant who buried his talent had been given less than the others. That's nothing new. In Jesus' day, it would seem, Jesus' listeners would look around and see others who had more than them: more money, more land, more marketable skills, more time to give, more... you finish the sentence. Isn't it interesting how little we humans have changed? We, most of us, find ourselves still, 2000 years later, measuring ourselves, focusing our attention on those who have more than we do, instead of those who have less. It's a stingy alchemy of envy and fear that creates a state of mind, a way of being and acting in the world based on scarcity—magnifying what we don't have, discounting what we do have. And that scarcity ethic prevails not just for us in these pews, but for most in this culture. Research shows it afflicts us monetarily straight across income levels, up until the top one or two percent of the population. It infects us just as destructively though when we think of non-monetary gifts. We're so aware of others out there who are more intelligent, more talented, more beautiful, more successful; more...you name the value. And we, too often, discount ourselves as being less: as having less personal qualities, less valuable abilities to contribute. Living from an ethic of scarcity: it's actually a measurable phenomena, and 99% of the time, it's a state of mind, not a fact of life. There are those out there in the world who truly fret because their yacht is too small and whatever will people think of them, and there are those who live in relative poverty who thank God that they have all they need and more. A state of mind, not a fact of life.

Now today you all know is Stewardship Sunday and this year's stewardship theme is "The courage to live abundantly." It was a theme chosen by the committee with serious deliberation, because especially in uncertain economic times, it is so difficult to shake that scarcity state of mind and focus instead on our abundance—on the gifts God has given us and how they might best be used. It takes, in these times, an extra measure of courage to make the choice to live mindfully out of our sense of gratitude instead of out of our fear. And yet that is still what God calls us to do. Whatever talents we have been given, in whatever measure we can, out of thankfulness we give back, we take care, we build, and serve, and attend to the needs of those less fortunate than we. One of the principal jobs of this community is for us to be reminders to each other: to help each other recollect the gifts we have, to thank each other for the particular gifts we each bring, to challenge each other to live as generously as we can.

Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly, Together we share the courage to live from that abundance. Thanks be to God. Amen.