

November 13, 2011

Preaching: Jim Best

Matthew 25:14-30

“Those who have Nothing”

Matthew 25:14-30

‘For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then 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.” ²¹His 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.” ²²And 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.” ²³His 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.” ²⁴Then 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; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” ²⁶But 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? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For 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. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Many years ago, I began to get involved in a movement called Steampunk.

Steampunk is a movement that finds its roots in such literature as Jules Verne and HG Wells. It is a mixture of Victorian with Science Fiction and has gone from literature to spawn genres of fashion, music, and art. One of the key elements of the Steampunk movement for me, is taking old things and making them new. The

music is often taking old tunes and giving them a new spin, or bands using older style instruments in their modern songs. The clothing is often throwbacks to an earlier age, with top hats and long coats, and cravats or, of course, bow ties. And the art and jewelry is most often comprised of clock gears and windings, of disassembled bits of other things, and found objects. In fact, I built myself a portable telegraph device using an old wooden plaque, some leather, the horn from an old Christmas ornament and some mesh from a piece of broken jewelry. And finally some electronic bits from American Science and Surplus. Items like this are why you will often find steampunkers prowling thrift shops, flea markets and garage sales, because we'll make things out of just about anything. Nothing is useless to us. Everything has value.

Now, anyone who has been following my facebook page knows that lately I have really been indulging my creative side, crafting useful items such as jewelry, earrings, pins, and necklaces, as well as completely useless items such as my clockwork flamingo. I have found the hobby relaxing and enjoyable, though I didn't have any real purpose to most of the items I was creating, it just seemed like something fun to do. Then, last week, I heard about a benefit for a friend of mine. His wife was in a very bad motorcycle accident several months ago, and the people in his community are throwing a fundraiser to help raise money to defray some of

the ongoing medical costs. They were looking for items for their silent auction, and here I was sitting with a pile of jewelry for which I had no other purpose.

In today's reading from Matthew, Jesus tells the parable of the servants with the talents. Back then, a Talent was a unit of measurement, often a weight of gold. In the parable, the master gives three of his servants gold to go out and manage while the master is away. The first two take their gold and do some trading, and they make money on the deal. The last one though is afraid. He is afraid of what might happen if he loses the money in trades or disaster, so he goes and buries it in the ground, so that when the master returns, he can wipe the dirt off and hand it back to him. The master, predictably is furious and berates the servant before having him thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. (g-nash, g-nash, g-nash)

Now this is a passage I am sure we've all heard many, many times. It is a fairly well used parable, especially right around church's stewardship campaigns. It is no coincidence that this parable falls during this time of year in the lectionary. And it is easy when we hear these parables and readings that we are so familiar with to glaze our eyes the moment the reading begins, after all, we've heard it before. But when we do that, we miss out! I am a firm believer in the fact that the Bible always has something new to say to us. No matter how many times we've heard a story, no matter how many times we read the same passage, I believe that

God has new things to say to us. So when I was reading this passage from Matthew and preparing for this sermon, one sentence, one phrase, leapt out at me from the master's condemnation of his servant, "but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

From those who have nothing.

That is a powerful statement, and it made me wonder, what was it? What thing did this last servant lack?

It wasn't money, it wasn't talent. They all had that. Some more than others, but they all had it. They were all given money, these talents, to use and manage for their master, so that wasn't what was lacking.

It wasn't that he lacked bringing gifts to God. portrayed in the story as the Master. They all brought something back at the end. the final servant did not return empty handed. He returned with the same amount that he had been given. So he didn't have nothing. Not in the physical sense.

What he lacked, what he had absolutely none of, was confidence. Confidence in his ability to use his talent for good! Fun Fact. Our use today of the word "Talent" to describe abilities that we have and things that we can do comes straight from this parable. In my opinion, it was the courage and the will to act that the servant was lacking. The servant knew that his talent in trading was not great. Apparently the master knew this as well, for the story says he gave to each of the

servants according to their ability. This servant was only given one, his talent was not great, but it still could have been used! Instead, he went and buried it in the ground, and when the end came, the talent was unused.

We all have skills, we all have talents. Some, really most, of them aren't anything to write home about. Some of them aren't fabulous or inspiring, but that doesn't mean we should bury them in the sand. When I was in High School, there was a guy who sang in our church youth choir with me. He didn't have a great voice, truthfully, he had an awful voice, but he was there every week for practice and he got up and sang with the rest of us on Sunday mornings. He had a very small talent for singing, but he used it. He wasn't afraid.

Think of all the things you can do. Not just the big talents that you have, but the little ones as well. Every talent you have can be useful. Every quirk, every hobby, every trait that makes you, you, is there for a reason. God doesn't want you to hide who you are. God doesn't want you to feel ashamed or embarrassed by any of the gifts that you possess. Think about the book of Genesis and the story of creation. God created everything. And each day God looked at what was created and God saw what? That It. Was. Good!

We all have talents. Things that we can do. None of us have nothing. Sure, maybe there are people out there who are better than us. Maybe just about

everyone in the world is better than us, but we still have our gifts. Modest as they may be. And God wants us to use them!

When the church is looking for people to cook or bake for Lazarus House, they aren't looking for only master chefs. They aren't looking only for people who have years of experience working in a kitchen, they are just looking for someone who can help.

Likewise, when you get a call looking for a volunteer, for, say, the nursery, they aren't looking for someone with a PHD in child development. They are looking for someone willing to use their gifts to help out.

Think of the gifts you have, the Talents you possess. Can you drive a car? We've often got people who need a ride to church. Can you read? Join a Bible Study or a book club and share your thoughts. Can you pray? Then stop and take a moment to let your prayers join with others over a prayer quilt. Can you stay up late? Then you could be a chaperone for the Sr. High lock-in which coincidentally is on December 28th in case you were wondering!

You may think, "There are others out there who would be better at this than me, so I won't do it at all." But who does that help? The servant wasn't reprimanded for being bad at his task, the servant was called out for not even attempting it. The servant buried his talent, and he was cast into the darkness for it.

This is important too, because this parable comes amidst a slew of end time predictions. Jesus is telling the disciples about the end, about judgement, and the kind of things that God wants us to do here on Earth! Use our talents! Use our gifts. Be all the good that God sees within us.

Because, from my point of view, this was what angered the master the most, that the talent was unused and therefore all the possible opportunities were missed and wasted! The servant could have taken that talent and traded it like the others had. He could have possibly made the same profits. He could have possibly even made more. Or, as the parable says, he even could have taken it and used the talent in the simplest way; used that talent in the most straightforward way and deposited it in a bank, earning the basic interest. But he did none of that. He let his fear guide him. He let his insecurity rule him. When it came to self-confidence, he had nothing.

We all have talents, and we need to use them. Think of all we could do if we let go of our worries or our insecurities, if we went out and used our gifts. Think of all we could do, all the lives we could touch, think of all the ways we could help others, in both big ways and small. Now think of all the possible opportunities that would be missed if we continued to sit back and do nothing.

If we have no confidence, if we do nothing, then as the scripture says, we will have nothing, but if we have courage, then we will reap the rewards. "For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance."

Amen.