

11.19.23 Are You Using What You've Been Given Matthew 25.14-30
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As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday it seems an appropriate Sunday to ask if any of you enjoy cooking? Do any of you watch cooking shows on TV or online? Some of you may be familiar with a cooking show on the Food Network called *Chopped*. Longtime BBC members Sarah and Michael Kemp's son, Ryan is an excellent chef, and his boss Marc Murphy, is a judge on *Chopped*. Ryan is the chef at MM (Marc Murphy) Kitchen Studio in Tribeca in New York. Marc is an extrovert and likes working the crowd in the front of the house. Ryan is an introvert and does all the work (creating, menu planning, ordering, prepping, and cooking) in the kitchen. Ryan could be on *Chopped* because he can create in the kitchen with whatever is given to him. I confess I haven't watched the show, but I'm told you receive a mystery ingredient basket, and **you have to use what you've been given to make something good.**

Sometimes, life is like a cooking show. You get handed something, a situation perhaps, with equal measures of stress, the unexpected, responsibility, and risk and you have to do the best you can to make something good out of it without being guaranteed it will turn out well. The level of risk goes up even more when what you're given doesn't belong to you, it belongs to someone else, and they give it to you to take care of and manage for a while until they return. Anyone who has housesat, or watched someone else's child, dog, cat, or even plants knows what I'm talking about. It's like the difference you feel in your gut when you're driving a rental car compared to how relaxed you feel when you're driving your own vehicle.

There have been many stories told and movies made about what happens when a person goes away leaving someone else responsible for taking care of something or someone. Will the person who's been entrusted with the house, the car, or the task fulfill that responsibility? Will they blow it, and if they do, can they fix the situation before the parents, boss, or master returns? This is the structure of countless stories. Matthew liked this structure as well and uses it several times in his gospel including in **Matthew 25:14-30**. A master goes away, and the question is how the slaves act when the master is not with them. What will they do with what's been entrusted to them? How will the master respond when he returns and sees what they've done?

Listen to the story Jesus tells. “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 & 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 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.’**”*

How do you feel after hearing that story? Maybe it depends on which of the characters you identify with - if you see yourself as the slave who received five or two talents and doubled what you were given, you feel good being invited into the joy of

your master. If relate to the slave who hid the talent in the ground, got chewed out by your master and thrown into the outer darkness, you couldn't feel worse. If you identify with the master, I wonder if it's because you've had experience with entrusting responsibility to someone maybe even a child, and you had it go well or not so well.

Let's walk through the story together and see what Jesus may be trying to teach us and the church. **First, notice that each of the slaves was trusted with at least one talent.** When we hear the word talent we tend to think of an ability like the talent to sing, paint, work with wood, or to play a sport. In the first century, a talent was a unit of weight of approximately 80 pounds, and when used as a unit of money, a talent was valued for that weight of silver. As currency, a talent was worth about 6,000 denarii. A denarius was the usual payment for a day's labor, so a talent was **the equivalent of 15 or 16 years pay** for a typical laborer. That's a lot of money!

The immensity of the sum reminds us of the great responsibility given to each slave by the master and to each of us by God. It's important to note the master gave **“to each according to his ability.”** That's the spiritual principle. **The greater the ability, the greater the responsibility.** As Jesus said in **Luke 12:48**, **“To whom much is given, much will be required.”** You'll be held responsible for what you've been given. Whatever abilities, spiritual gifts, financial resources, knowledge, however much time we're given, God wants us to use them well for the kingdom of heaven.

When you think about a talent as a unit of currency, which slave in the story do you think faced the greatest pressure? I'd say the one who received five talents because he had the most to lose. Yet God is trusting each of us to do something with what we've been given. For those of us who have been Christians for a long time, perhaps you've heard one or two sermons on the parable of the talents in your life and some of them praised the slaves who received five talents and two talents and doubled them and condemned the third slave for hiding his talent in the ground. But shouldn't we be careful not to praise the first two slaves too quickly. After all, how do you make ten out of five or four out of two? You risk losing the five or the two. To some of us that sounds irresponsible and risky. What would the master have said if he had returned and the first slave had said, *“You gave me five talents and I traded with them and I only*

have one left?” What would that conversation have been like? What if they slave who had received two said he had also traded with his and was left with nothing?

The one talent slave thought about how those conversations would have gone and he didn't think they would have gone well at all. We need to remember that digging a hole and hiding money or valuables was one aspect of wise fiscal management in the first century. It wasn't considered foolish or stupid, it was a prudent, acceptable way to preserve some of your assets against the risk of thieves, robbery, or invasion. Yet this approach is condemned in the strongest possible terms when the master returns.

The one talent slave says, *'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.'* Just because the one talent slave says this about the master, doesn't mean it's true or accurate. This is the one talent slave's perception of his Master. He views him as harsh and demanding and as a result he's afraid and makes a fear-based decision which rarely is the right one.

I don't think it's fair to accept the one talent slave's view of the master because the evidence we have in the parable would lead us to the opposite conclusion. **It's more accurate to say the master is incredibly generous, trusting, thoughtful, and eager to reward his people.** Think about it. The master entrusts a vast amount of his wealth and property to these three individuals. He's incredibly **generous** in what he places in their hands, he doesn't hold back. The Master demonstrates amazing **trust**. He doesn't seem concerned or fearful that the slaves will skip town with the huge amount of money he's given them and move to Florida. Not only is the Master generous and trusting, but the Master is also **thoughtful**. He doesn't overwhelm the two talent or one talent slave by giving them more money to manage than they're capable of – he gives **to each according to their ability** so everyone can be successful. The Master is also **eager to reward** his people. While the proportion of gifts given to each is different, the same faithfulness is required of all, and faithfulness is **equally rewarded**. The slave who turned two talents into four heard the same words of affirmation as the slave who turned five into ten. The Master treats them with perfect equity and without partiality or favoritism.

Who do you think takes the greatest risk in the parable - the slave who received five talents and risked losing them all? The one talent slave who hid his talent in the ground out of fear. Isn't it **the Master**? The Master entrusted his slaves with an incomprehensible amount of money and trusted them to manage it properly, granting great responsibility and freedom. This was a huge risk, especially because he was gone for a long time and didn't leave specific instructions. As time passed each slave faced temptation. *"Maybe the Master isn't returning, and I can start siphoning off some of this money and using it for myself to make my life more comfortable and even luxurious."* The Master could have lost everything, but he was willing to take a risk on his slaves that they would do the right thing and use what he gave them and put it to work.

We tend to think God should be fair and the Master in the story represents the Lord. So, some people may be bothered that the slaves don't receive an equal amount of talents, because God should be fair, and everything should be equal. Yet the inequality of talents in the parable reflects the reality of life. Everyone isn't given equal talents, you may not like that, but it's a fact. The Master is fair in that he treats the first two slaves with absolute equity, they both receive the same words of praise and the same reward –because they proved trustworthy in a few things, they'll be put in charge of many things, and they'll enter into the joy of their master. Because life isn't fair and people want God to be fair, some people are also upset by verses 28-29, *"So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. **For to all 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."*

It's important to understand that Jesus isn't talking about money here. He's sharing a **spiritual truth about those who have the courage to take risks and work for the kingdom**. The more courageous you are, the more willing you are to take risks and have faith and work for the kingdom of God, to all who have and display these virtues, *"more will be given, and they will have an abundance."* In other words, your courage, faith, and willingness to be bold and take risks for the kingdom will grow all the more. Sadly, for those like the one talent slave who lack the courage and faith to risk and work for the kingdom and don't prove faithful and trustworthy, for *"those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."* The passage ends with a stern

warning of the consequences of not being willing to risk for the kingdom, “As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” You certainly don’t want to end up there.

I began by talking about cooking shows and the idea that **sometimes you need to use what you’re given to make something good. The question is, Are You Using What You’ve Been Given?** The answer for so many in our church is a resounding, “Yes!” We’ve had a great few weeks here at BBC. There have been so many examples of people sharing their time, talents, and resources for the sake of the kingdom of God and to bless other people. The Silent Auction, the World Mission Offering, Trunk or Treat, the Holiday Fair, the Habitat for Humanity Brewster Build kick off, the Brewster Appreciation Lunch this past Thursday and a fun and delicious family dinner last night. We’ve had so many people sharing their time, talents, and treasure, proving themselves faithful and trustworthy, blessing people and giving joy to God.

I want to close by sharing another example. The Habitat project in Brewster, like all building projects, is facing increased costs and we have a donor at BBC who believes in the ministry of Habitat and the importance of housing who has given a challenge gift of **\$20,000 to BBC** toward that project. If you’re also moved by the cause of families being able to own their own homes, and helping families with children stay on the Cape, I invite you in the coming weeks to make a special gift to BBC and mark it for **Brewster Habitat Build.**

I hope and pray every single one of us will continue or begin putting our talents to work to share Christ’s love, our witness, our time, our resources, so that one day you may hear, *‘Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the **joy** of your master.’*

Prayer:

Risk-taking God, thank you for taking a chance on the world, humanity, and me. Forgive me for when I allow my fears, caution, or desire for safety to override my faith and courage. Thank you for all you have entrusted to me. Fill me with the Holy Spirit that I might live with boldness and courage, love, and humility, willing to take risks with the talents, resources, and relationships you have given me, willing to risk failure in order to serve you wisely and well all of my days. Amen.

Benediction: A sleepy angel was awakened by the brightness of Jesus ascent into heaven. The angel saw Jesus and said, *“Where have you been?”* Jesus replied, *“I’ve been on earth.”* *“How long were you there?”* *“A few years.”* *“How did it go?”* the angel asked. *“They crucified me,”* Jesus said. *“That’s awful, but you must have had an incredibly vast influence,”* the angel remarked. Jesus said, *“I had about 120 followers.”* *“What will become of your work?”* the angel asked. Jesus said, *“I left it in the hands of my friends.”* *“And if they fail?”* asked the angel. Jesus said, *“I have no other plans.”*

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Has anyone ever given you something to watch or manage for them – like a house, a car, a pet, or a child? How did you feel being given that responsibility?
2. What is your opinion of the master in the parable? Is he trusting, generous, harsh, hard to work for? What in the parable leads you to take the position you do?
3. When Jesus talks in this parable about “talents” what do you think he’s referring to?
4. What distinguishes the two servants who are praised and rewarded from the one who is not? What do they do differently? What are the implications of this for you?
5. Who do you think takes the greatest risk in the parable? Explain your answer.
6. How can you put your talents to work to share Christ’s love and do God’s work in your circumstances so that one day you may hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Try to be specific.