

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

Another week, another Gospel story is not easy to proclaim or hear. It has been a Fall of weeping and gnashing of teeth and outer darkness. And yet we are called to have ears to hear – so we need to dig in to what the writer of Matthew’s Gospel was doing with the parable.

While most commonly known as the “Parable of the Talents,” this tale is in actuality not centered on the talents, but on the third slave, the master, and their relationship.<sup>1</sup>

That being said, it’s good to know something about what a talent was for context. In the time of Jesus, a talent was an enormous sum of money. One talent was roughly equal to 15 years of wages for the average day laborer.

This means the first slave was given 75 years of wages (more than they would make in a lifetime), another 30 years (most of a working lifetime), and the last one 15 years.

We are told the master “entrusted” his property with them – with no other direction – and then went away. Like is the case with many parables, there is an over the top quality to the circumstances of the story.

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 4.*

Because not only are we talking huge, unrealistic sums of money, but two thirds of the slaves took that money and were able to beat the odds by doubling it in the market! Only the last slave hid the money by burying it in the ground – but both those choices were actions which set the stage for the return of the master and the settling of accounts.

All of this being said, though, for Matthew, this parable wasn't about money at all. Matthew puts this parable as the second to last story Jesus told his disciples before the events leading to his passion and death.

Jesus wasn't giving his friends last minute financial advice, he was again (like he had been all along) teaching them how to live faithfully in the world once he was gone. He was telling them that life, and living, is full of risks – but that if they trust God and don't give into fear, then they will continue to follow the path he set out for them.

It was the slaves that took the exorbitant gifts and took risks with them – that resisted the fear of just trying to hold on to what they'd been given – that in the end entered into joy upon the master's return.

Not because they doubled his money, but because they didn't keep it hidden – because they lived like they really trusted God every day.

But the third slave didn't risk or trust, and instead buried the money in the ground, as like in a grave. He acted out of fear, which he readily admitted to when questioned by his returning master.

He was able to return coin for coin exactly what he was given. But instead of living the way of Christ, he had let fear keep him from growing – just as it did the gift he was given stewardship over.

The slave that was driven by fear learned the lesson that the greatest risk of all is not to risk anything – not care deeply and profoundly enough about anything to invest deeply, to give your heart away, and in the process risk everything<sup>2</sup> in the trust that you will gain even more.

Because fear is powerful. It can spark in us a fight or flight response. But can also make us cling rather than let go – binding us to our fear. Fear never sets us free.

Jesus knew this. It's why he told this story at the end of his time with his friends. He loved them, and he knew that they would likely return to that upper room to hide in fear. But he wanted so much more for them.

He wanted them to live lives of love, not fear. He wants us to live lives of love, not fear. And so, he told them this parable to call them – and us – to a fullness of life built on God' love every day, and in all our actions.

We would do well to remember the words of Anglican Poet and priest George Herbert, found in hymn 382 (King of glory, King of peace): “Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee.”

This is our call, and when we live this, we bury nothing.

~ AMEN ~

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<sup>2</sup> Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 4, Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17 – Reign of Christ), pg. 310.