

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, November 19, 2023, based on the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25.

“Are you a one, two, or five, talent person?”

At the end of the day, or at the end of our lives, how many of you would like the preacher to say, or a family member, or a friend, “Well done good and faithful servant?” Most of us, right? If someone shares this about me at my funeral, I will know that I made a difference with the gifts God gave me.

But most days, I don't feel very extraordinary... like I left some things on the table, or I missed an opportunity to serve Christ and his kingdom. Or that in my human condition... my self-centeredness got in the way of seeing and helping others. I often find myself squandering my time and talents, or at a minimum, I compare myself to others and discount myself.

Unless you consider doing the New York Times “Wordle” a talent, that is. Jeranna and I have a fierce competition with that every day.

Then there's our phones, right? A great tool for communication and navigation, but how much time do we waste on our phones?

In the parable of the talents from Matthew 25, Jesus reminds his disciples that one day he will leave them, and that they will be entrusted with carrying on his ministry of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom... of healing, mending, love, and justice. But also the gracious fact that each of his disciples have been given different gifts and abilities to share. This parable speaks to us as individuals and to the church today.

In the parable, a wealthy master entrusted 3 of his servants with huge sums of money. A talent in Jesus' time was money. 6000 denarii to be exact. 6000 days wages. 20 years of wages for a day laborer. This was no small change. Today a talent in our time is our gifts and abilities. This should get us thinking about how much we have been given by God. Everything, right? We have received an abundance of grace and provision from God daily. How will we use it?

In the parable, each servant was given talents according to their ability. To one servant the master gave 5 talents. To another 2 Talents. And to another 1 talent. Don't let the numbers fool you. Any way you cut it, a talent is about 1 million dollars today. Each was given much.

When the master returned, just like Jesus will return some day, he asked for an accounting of how they stewarded the master's money. The first two servants doubled the master's money. They got the old "Well done good and faithful servant" and were given more to steward. We all need to hear a well done good and faithful servant from time to time.

But the third servant, who really didn't like the master and his business practices, out of fear hid his talent in the ground. He buried it and returned it intact. Now on the surface, this seems like not a bad idea. Just bury it and return it. But the master expected some sort of ROI... some compound interest. In the end, this servant was called wicked, lazy, and worthless. Ouch. His talent was taken from him, given to the 10 talent person, and he was thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. He was judged for poorly stewarding the resources the master entrusted him with.

Which of the three servants do you relate to? Are you rocking it like the 5 and 2 talent servants? Or, are you like the one talent person? If we are honest, we might be like the one talent person. We do hide or squander our time and talents. We don't take risks for the kingdom of God. We are afraid of failing. We do make excuses of why the things of the world are more important than faith matters or serving others. We think someone else can do it.

But does that mean we should quit trying to use what God gave us to spread the Kingdom of heaven? No, of course not? Brother Martin Luther once said something like, "Sin Boldly... but ask for forgiveness even more boldly. Instead of living in fear and not doing anything, we are to take risks and use the quantity of time and talent we have been given to spread the love of Christ to everyone. Just

know that you won't get it right all the time or even some of the time, but remember God's grace is sufficient for you.

If we are not careful, the parable of the talents can be turned into work's righteousness. The good news is in the warning and the reminder of how much God has entrusted to us. And that all have different talents to share, and we are the diverse body of Christ in the world.

Sharing our gifts can cause ripple effects for the kingdom. Saying a kind word, showing up for someone, or playing music or singing for others can bring them joy and peace. Giving a compliment can make someone's day. Feeding the hungry or helping a neighbor in need brings forth the kingdom.

Finally, what is the greatest gift we have ever received from God? It is Jesus. God loves us in spite of our constant mismanagement of our gifts and talents. Jesus still came to earth for us and for our salvation. In Christ have been given grace upon grace. Our response should **not** be to live in fear and bury our talents, but to live thankful and generous lives. Amen.