

Matthew 25:14-30  
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“Practicing Risk”

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Today our parable tells of two servants who invested their master's gifts and gained substantially on their investment, they were praised. We also hear of the third servant who buried their master's gift and was scolded.

It's a pretty harsh scolding the third receives, he comes and admits, “Master, I knew you were a harsh person, 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 have what is yours.” The master turns the servant's words right back on him as part of his criticism, “You wicked and lazy servant! 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...”

This is exactly what we would expect in our modern, results oriented society. We knew the third servant was in trouble. He'll get demoted, he may even get downsized right out the door. If you don't make money for your master, your gone, that's the world today.

Many church people hear this parable and experience compassion for the third servant who loses everything simply for being safe and frugal. What is this master thinking, I mean aren't such protective and safe servants the backbone of society, and the church?

Jesus tells the parable to listeners, many of whom had been with him long enough to know he is not talking purely about financial investment. The listeners would associate the master with God, and the servants with God's people. And they would know the Talent is not a narrow reference to a sum of money. They would associate Talent with the full variety of God's gifts; time, faith, ability, compassion, possessions, wisdom, community, peace and justice making, our whole life. The audience would know this parable is a lesson in humankind's relationship with God and all of creation. But what exactly is it trying to teach us?

This week I began reading a book called Reaching Beyond. The book is a conversation among two great Jazz Musicians, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter; and an eastern religious leader Daisaku Ikeda. In one exchange Herbie Hancock is talking about a time he was part of a group led by Miles Davis, and during one of Miles' solos, Herbie recollects playing “a chord that was really wrong” he continues... “Miles reacted by playing some notes that made my chord sound right. It was like a magician. I was amazed. For a few minutes afterward, it was almost like I couldn't move... I realized he hadn't judged what I had played. He just heard it and responded with, ‘how can I turn this into something, how can I use this?’”

As I have gotten into Jazz more in the last year, I am finding it a style of music that likes to take risks, likes to embrace unexpected challenges. One of the best parts of Jazz for me is that the next note or phrase is often not predictable. It doesn't always follow in a sequential order.

That brings the music it's improvisational nature. But it also requires the artist to practice taking risks.

I worry we are becoming an increasingly risk adverse society. We sit back and assume, if there is a problem; be it climate crises, or mass shootings, well... why should I get involved. We might even conclude that though I have my opinion, I can also see some truth on both sides. Perhaps we hope our officials will do something, or maybe this time our nation will engage in a substantial debate about gun regulation, or sustainable sources of power, but that debate is probably headed to a standstill.

In the last half of this message I want to invite us to think about the spiritual issue I believe is at the heart of Jesus' parable. Embracing Risk as part of life and faith. If we look back at the gospel, the common feature of servants one and two is they both invested. They both took a risk. Author and retired Pastor Rev. William White, in a creative re-writing of this parable goes so far as to suggest if there were a 4<sup>th</sup> servant who received talents, and invested them but lost on his return, he too would have received the praise of the master. In other words, God has given such abundance but if we bury it, it cannot do its job. It cannot circulate and renew life. Our savior's life, death and resurrection stand as the pre-eminent example of God's call to expend all we have been given in service to the gospel, without focusing on the return.

I am aware there is risk inherent in living. Risk in parenting. Risk in driving a vehicle. Risk in seeing a movie. Risk in going to school or work, or church. Risk in crossing the street. Risk in dining out. And for many of us church is the place we turn to for comfort and relative consistency.

Yet, is the Christian not decidedly positioned to invite society into a new perspective on risk? Instead of merely trying to manage or tolerate risk, are Christians not abundantly resourced to embrace it?

We have the resources of faith as our foundation. Our lives are built upon God's gifts of wisdom and prophecy, so we can picture a better world. God's gift of Grace allows us to experience love even when we are unlovely. God's gift of courage helps us take creative steps to draft a better world. God's gift of love assures us we do not make any journey alone. God's gift of discipleship strengthens us to build a better world. God's gift of salvation promises eternal happiness. God's gift of forgiveness and reconciliation keep our mistakes from permanently destroying our unity. Perhaps the biggest piece of this foundation; God has made us people of resurrection hope, keenly aware how vibrant and surprising new life emerges from despair, destruction and death. That is the posture of faith from which we are able to take risks to further the gospel.

We preachers live in this world too, we become frightened and want to climb back in our shells. We know many attend churches because it provides a place of comfort in a chaotic day to day world. Yet, taking risks for the gospel is what Jesus invites us to; risks to further faith,

risks to further peace, risks to further healing, risks to broaden community, risks to deepen justice.

As I think of the foundation we are given, my ears perk up as I hear Daisaku quote one of his teachers later in the book Reaching Beyond, “if one lights a fire for others, one will brighten one’s own way.”

In a world, and church facing change at supersonic speed, we who claim this powerful foundation in Christ... we who know the ultimate security offered through him, the only real security in this life and the next, we are being called to practice taking risks for the sake of the gospel. How might we meet the challenge?

Amen