

80 pounds of Silver

[Matthew 25:14-30](#)

As the church year comes to an end, our readings have taken a turn towards the end of time with warnings to be on our guard, to be ready, to be prepared. This morning's parable is one of these stories, warning us of what will happen if we get it wrong. I expect that you have heard this story of the talents before – it's a favorite of Sunday School teachers because it seems to have such a simple moral. Use the talents God has given you wisely.

But there some problems here which we need to grapple with as adult readers of the Word. So much so that Mike Egleston was telling me this is his least favorite parable, suggesting as it does that Jesus is encouraging capitalism. If you can't think what to do with your talent, at least invest it wisely so you will get interest on it, right? And yet the Old Testament is quite adamant that you shouldn't lend money and charge interest.

And what exactly is a talent? I always thought of it as just a large coin. But no, not really. It was a measure of weight. 80 pounds to be exact. Last week I carried a 50lb sack of walnuts up my driveway and reflected that it doesn't get easier with age. I can't imagine picking up 80lbs on my own. When referring to money, a talent was the equivalent of 80lbs of silver. It was worth about 6000 denarii and a denarius was average pay for one day's labor. So a single talent was worth about 16 years income. If we take the median household income in Los Osos and multiply it by 16 we're looking at 1.2million dollars.

Jesus was a wonderful storyteller and I'm sure that using massive figures like that would have brought a chuckle to his hearers. Just imagine, a man going on a journey and leaving each of his slaves with over a million dollars. But wait, that's just one talent... leaving one of them with five times that much - 6 million dollars. It's so absurd as to be silly.

Which makes me wonder, does Jesus really expect us to take this seriously?

He's talking about vast fortunes here, not just a few skills and abilities.

So let's try reading the story again. 'It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave \$6m, to another \$2.5, to another 1.2m, to each according to his ability. When he came back, the slaves returned his money and showed what they had done with it, but one said, "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.'" Uh-ho... that's the wrong answer isn't it?

But look where it's coming from – fear. The other two didn't mention fear. The third slave seems to have had a different relationship with the master. He thinks that he is a harsh man who exploits the land and presumably exploits other people too, so the slave wasn't taking any risks – he just buried his fortune and waited for time to pass.

What if we have misunderstood this parable because our eyes were set on the talents and not on the people? What if this is a parable about what we do with God's abundant grace and who we

understand God to be? The guy who was scared and hoarded what he had is the one who loses out in the end and then, using the words of the master, Jesus says, “For 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.”

I want to suggest to you this morning that this parable is about what we do with the abundance of God’s grace and blessing to us. Of course that includes the skills and abilities we have been given and the education that has enabled us to hone those skills. And yes of course we want to use those for the building up of the church and for the expansion of God’s reign. But his parable is about something much bigger.

It’s about how we image God. God has given us the riches of this planet to care for. God has given us land to work and the abundance of micro-organisms to help us, but we have become fearful. Instead of living in an awareness of God’s abundant gifts we have been afraid that even what we have will be taken away and so we have dug ourselves a hole and hoarded it.

I am reminded of the story of the manna which came from heaven every morning. The Hebrews were encouraged to harvest as much as they needed, but no more. Any excess that they took, thinking that perhaps there would not be enough tomorrow, went bad overnight. Very bad, in fact it grew maggots. Why would they have been afraid that God would not feed them the next day?

When you look at the world we live in there are many reasons to be afraid. But not afraid of God. God’s love is the one constant, the thing that never changes.

God’s love for us is so great that he sent his Word, his very self, to welcome us back into his arms. God’s love for us is so great that she allows us to have complete free will. We can choose to take the riches of her grace and hide them in a hole in the ground so we have to live as if we never got the gift. Or we can enjoy the riches of her love and her grace and live in joy... discovering that the more we share, the more we have.

We hear this parable as the capitalists that we are. When the first slave says ““Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents,”” we hear that he took the money and used it in commercial trade to make more. Slave turned entrepreneur.

But we can see this “trading” differently. This slave took the fortune that he was entrusted with and used it to spread the wealth. Perhaps he gave it all away and in so doing increased the well-being of the whole community and so it returned to him in that amazing circular energy flow which happens in the reign of God. It returned to him, multiplied. Because, “to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance.”

People of God, this parable is not about working harder and making sure that you are using every ability, every opportunity that God has given you, always looking to do more and more. No. This parable is about trusting in God’s love and living everyday with an open, generous hand. This parable is about having joy and faith in the tremendous gift that God has already given us – reconciliation and new life in Christ. This parable is about trusting in God’s love and sharing all our resources for the furtherance of his kin-dom.

God has given us assets that money can't buy. God has given us her unconditional love and as we share that with each other and with our enemies so it grows exponentially and before we know it the reign of God is here among us.

Thanks be to God!