

“Sweet music to our ears” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
November 19, 2017 Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost  
Matthew 25:14-30

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

This story that Jesus tells his followers has been used to justify capitalism, encourage people to give money to the church and used as proof that the poor will always be poor. I was astounded at the variety of scriptural interpretations proposed for this story and the agenda that was pushed with each interpretation. All preachers probably have an agenda when they preach. My agenda for today is quite simple. Let's look at how this scripture applies to our lives today. I'm interested in how you and I can use this teaching of Jesus to better serve God and Jesus.

But before we get to that, take a moment to mentally pick out one character in this story who you identify with, who you relate to. If you were to pick out the character in this story that you relate to, which would it be? One of the slaves that made money for the master? Would it be the play-it-safe slave? Would it be the master with unimaginable wealth? Perhaps, you'd like to be a friend of the slaves who made so much money!

Have your character in mind? Good, we'll get back to that later in the sermon.

What point do you think Jesus is trying to get across to his followers when he tells this story? I believe he's illustrating the generosity of God. The money stands for the generosity of God. Matthew's version of this story deals with sums that are unimaginable to those who heard Jesus tell this story. A talent roughly equals 6,000 denarii. One denarius was the daily wage of a common laborer. So, a talent would be worth about 20 years of wages for the average worker. Five talents would be equivalent to 100 years wages for a common person – an unimaginable amount. Just as Jesus tells the parable of the sower who sowed seeds with abandon – on good and bad soil - showing us how generous God is, I believe Jesus is again telling us that God is generous with God's gifts to us. God is generous beyond our imagination!

God gives us abundant talents and abilities for the purpose of spreading God's message to the world. Some of you are good organizers, some are good listeners, some of you are blessed with the ability to make money and share it. Each of us has his or her God-given talents to use to help spread God's love to those around you.

Let's assume that Jesus is the master in this parable. That means Jesus is trusting those who serve him with an overabundance of God-given talents and abilities to serve God. The more you use them, the more God will bless you and give you more. Those who serve Jesus? That would be you and me.

God has given each of us gifts and we are to use them boldly as the two productive servants. The master complimented the two slaves in the same way, **'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.'**

But there's a third servant. Not quite half of this story is dedicated to the conversation the master has with the third slave. Who could this slave represent? Could it be those who don't use the talents God has given them because of fear? Could Jesus be referring to those who don't believe his message. Probably both.

Specifically, I believe Jesus is using this story to criticize the Pharisees and to warn his listeners not to be like them. Earlier in Chapter 23 of Matthew, Jesus makes a series of 'woe' statement about the Pharisees. Just to refresh your memory, here's one of the 'woe' statements from chapter 23, verse 13: **"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them."**

Jesus is critical of the Pharisees and they are critical of him and his message, so critical they plot to kill Jesus. The Pharisees probably felt that they had been taking care of the Hebrew people all these years and now this upstart named Jesus comes into town and calls them on the carpet for their practices. What nerve! Wasn't Jesus invading their territory? The Pharisees most likely saw Jesus as coming into town and enjoying the fruits of their labor. Of course, they would call him a harsh man, reaping where he didn't sow.

What character did you pick out that you related to in this story? As you think about that character, let's see what we can learn from each character to apply to our lives today?

Did you relate to one of the slaves who pleased the master? What application does that have to your life today? I believe that Jesus is telling us to use our talents boldly. We are to multiple the gifts God gives us to forward the Christian message in the world. Each of us needs to accept our God-given gifts and use them for God's glory, not ours.

If you related to the third slave, the cautious and careful one, what application does that have to your life today? I believe we can learn two things. First, that we are not to bury our natural, God-given talents. We are not to play it safe. We are to get out there and try new things, talk to people about Jesus, to spread the news about this church. We are not to hide our light under a bushel basket. We are to be bold, to take risks. You and I will make mistakes, but God's grace and God's forgiveness are so big, so great, that like the 100 years of wages the 5 talents represented – God's grace and forgiveness are beyond our imagination. So, as Martin Luther said, 'sin boldly.' Meaning take risks to forward the kingdom.

Second, for some of us, this story Jesus tells has an ending that can be a bit unnerving. Jesus is telling us that there are consequences to our behavior. Jesus is telling the third servant to think about the way he acted and the consequences of his actions. You could almost think of this last part of the story as Jesus pulling you aside and saying: "Let's talk. You need to understand there are consequences to your behavior." Jesus is warning those who think that following him is risk-free or that following him is less than demanding of our best.

What is the overriding message of this story Jesus tells? I believe Jesus' message is that we all need to recognize that everything belongs to God. Our money, our time, our very lives. The talents God gives us are not to be wasted, hidden or squandered. Those talents are to be used. Perhaps seeing your time, talents and treasures through new glasses will bring this into focus. Imagine how different your life would be if the lens you and I used to determine how to use our resources was whether or not what we did with them forwarded the kingdom of God. (repeat)

There's good news for everyone. When we trust our God, who is indeed trustworthy, we are free to boldly and freely use our God-given talents, knowing that we have nothing to fear. For then, you will hear the master say, **'enter into the joy of your master.'**

And those words will, indeed, be sweet music to our ears.