So, What Do We Do With It?

Matthew 25:14-30
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 20, 2003
Heritage Congregational Church, Madison, WI

Today we look at the parable of the talents as we conclude a three-week series on what Jesus said about money. The first week we reviewed how often Jesus spoke of money and with what ease He broached the subject. By looking at five different passages, we heard Jesus warning over and over about the temptation of loving money. If you love money and serve it, says Jesus, you cannot love God and serve God that way that you should.

Last week we heard four more passages that share what Jesus has to say about money. Andy by looking closely at the story of the poor widow we learned that all we are and all we have belongs to God—even our money. Today, we look at what Jesus says to do with the money that God has entrusted to our care through the parable of the talents.

This parable is a familiar one. Found in both Luke and Matthew, the parable tells of a wealthy master who entrusts all that he owns to three of his slaves. He gives to each slave, according to their own ability. The master goes away and the slaves are left to do what they will with their master's property.

The first and second slaves take their master's money and try to make it grow. They make great effort and they take great risk—but they want what their master owns to be used well. And in the end it is. Both of them double what the master has entrusted to their care.

The third slave, however, does not seek to use or increase what has been given to him by the master. Instead of making and effort or taking any risks, he digs a hole and buries the gift of his master, hiding it away from any possible use.

After a long time, the master returns and personally settles accounts with each slave. The master is pleased with the actions of the first two slaves, saying that they have been trustworthy and done well. As a result, they will be put in charge of many things.

But when the master meets with the third slave, he is insulted by the slave and blamed for the lack of care taken with the one talent that had been given. The master becomes angry, calls the third slave wicked and lazy, takes the one talent from him and condemns him to the outer darkness.

This parable speaks volumes about the nature of the gift and what Jesus would have us do with the gifts, money included, entrusted to us by God, our master.

First of all, the parable reminds us of the value of what we are given by God. In the parable, the master entrust everything to his slaves. And what he has—his everything—is great wealth. One talent was worth fifteen year's wages. Together, the slaves hold the livelihoods of several lifetimes in their care. A lot of money!

Secondly, God has given gifts according to our ability. God has done all the planning, first giving the ability or abilities themselves and then given the gifts accordingly. God has worked in our lives individually, and planned our work.
Thirdly, we are to use our God-given gift of money and to take risks with it. We are not to hide what we are given or keep it to ourselves or keep it safe. We are supposed to spread it around and do what we can to help it grow. It must not sit idle. It must be used. Invest and receive interest; that is what the parable's master would have us do.

And lastly, the master rewards those who care for the money, those who take time and make an effort with it. In this parable, money is a valuable resource that is worth our time and effort. We are to nurture it and encourage its growth. We are to share ourselves with the gift of money and help it to be all that it can be. Money is a precious commodity. We are to respect and appreciate it.

Now, all of this is well and good—our valuing money, making and effort with it, using it and respecting it as a gift from God. But there is a large piece of the puzzle missing, and that is the why. Why do all these things with what God has given to us? What purpose is behind it?

The answer is, of course, found in the parable itself. Matthew would not do otherwise.

The first two slaves are driven, are motivated somehow, to expand what their master has shared with them. They are not told what the reward will be, so that cannot be the reason for their great effort. They do know, I believe, that when the master returns they will return it all, their gains or their losses, to him. That is why they work so hard, why they are so diligent and energetic, why they are willing to take risks. It is not for personal monetary gain or recognition that they work so hard and turn a profit. Instead, it is out of a desire to please their master. The way that they handle the gifts given show their love and respect for the master. They want to further his purposes and help him accomplish his goals. That is why they do what they do with their master's money. It is the motivation that is important.

The same is true for us and the money that God gives to us. The way that we use it reflects our feelings about God. Our spending, our sharing, our risk taking, our encouragement of growth all work to show our love and respect for God and God's gift to us. It does not belong to us, but belongs to God. It is a great resource to be used not for our own personal gain, but to further God's purposes. Our work, our energy, our persistence show that it is God we love and not the money itself. We work to give the gift back to the giver.

I believe that the choices we make with money can help God's kingdom to come. And in this parable, Jesus tells us that the end result of using God's money the way God would have us is the joy of the master—the beginning of the kingdom. That is what Jesus has been telling us all along about money—that when we serve God, money is something that we use not for ourselves, but for God. It is one of many gifts or resources that God entrusts to our care to further the kingdom. Money is given so that divine purposes may be accomplished, and so that we may grow closer to God, reveling in the joy that is there when we are one in purpose. Amen.

Peace,

Rev. Cynthia Bacon

Minister

You may email at: cbacon@heritagemadison.org