

“Talent Does What It Can”

Salado UMC, Salado, Tx 76571—Preaching Text: Matthew 25:14-30

15 November 2020—24th Sunday after Pentecost

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“Talent develops in tranquility, character in the full current of human life”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 - 1832).

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Hear the day’s lesson: The Parable of the Talents:

14 “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, [A talent was worth more than fifteen years’ wages of a laborer] to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ 21 His master said to him, ‘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.’ 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ 23 His master said to him, ‘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.’

24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ 26 But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest.

28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 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. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 25:14-30).

Most folks who have basic Bible knowledge, or attend worship faithfully, recognize Jesus' parable of the talents. A wealthy man goes on a journey and entrusts his slaves with talents, a financial entity. To the slaves he gives five, two, and one talent. The first two slaves double what the master advanced them, while the third buries his solitary talent. His account is inventive, if not a social blunder of the first order. Do you recall his account: "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."

We can draw several inferences from Jesus' parable. First, the master is pleased with risk takers. Conversely, it troubles the master that the fearful slave hid his talent. Second, it pleases the master when the enterprising and creative slaves do well. Likewise, the slave who shows no creativity at all, troubles the returning master. The master responds to the fearful, digging slave: "As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." A third meaning Jesus' parable offers is that risk-takers with the master's talents build God's kingdom. The fearful simply lack utility in God's work.

We can suppose then, that God desires creative, enterprising, and useful disciples. God, perhaps, has little use for those who are not. Let's look at the context of this parable. The prior text is Matthew 25:1-12. It is the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. The *Reader's Digest* version is that preparation is a watchword for five bridesmaids. Five bridesmaids remain unprepared. The prepared bridesmaids go into the wedding banquet, while the five unprepared bridesmaids are at the local Wal-Mart trying to buy oil for their lamps. Jesus completes this parable by reminding his listeners that "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matthew 25:13).

The Parable of the Judgment of the Nations (Sheep and Goats) follows the Talents. A notable detail about this parable is given by the righteous/unrighteous that "the Son of Man separates . . . as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-32): "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink" (Matthew 25:37, 44)? This parable suggests that authentic disciples do the righteous thing without regard to a reward. Their faith beckons them to care for the thirsty, hungry, naked, ill, and imprisoned. Similarly, the unrighteous goats imply that they would have done the right thing, if they had only known that by doing it to "the least of these" that they were acting in good faith toward Jesus.

Thus, when we line up the three parables and their meanings, we uncover an order—Be prepared, be industrious, and "you never know" when you serve the master

in service to others. Matthew's telling these parables in this sequence is not by chance. Rather, Matthew reveals that true discipleship operates in stewardship.

In the summer of 1990, a new couple joined our church. Mike McAdams and I became friends, sharing an interest in a wide variety of things. During the pledging season, he came into my office and asked, "David, I am embarrassed by the question I am about to ask, but I want to do the right thing. Tammy and I have never belonged to a church as adults. We do not know what an appropriate pledge to the church is. We give when we come, but we have never tried to systematically think about what we should give yearly to the church."

He stunned me by the simple sincerity of his question. I also realized that we, as a church, had talked so little about the practical side of stewardship that many of our young families really had no idea about what was an appropriate annual pledge. I said, "Mike I know a couple who started to give to the church. They began at \$100 dollars a month. Steadily, they increased their gift over the years toward a tithe. Start where you are comfortable and set a five-year tithe goal." Mike's trust in me was clear at that moment because he pulled out his checkbook and wrote a \$1200 check on the spot.

What I realized in our exchange was not that Mike wanted to avoid his responsibility. No, he rather wanted to know what it was. No one had ever actually talked about what the concrete act of giving to his local church might look like. We often talk in theoretical ways about our duty which never gets down to reality. He doubled his pledge the next year and increased it every year as his annual salary grew. He was serious about his faith.

Jesus never asks us to do more than we can, but he does ask us to take our discipleship seriously. No one can tell you what to do, but if you are in a prayer conversation with God on a regular basis, then God can give you a nudge in the right direction. Whether you have five talents, or two talents, or simply one talent, let God show you how to be a risk-taker, who is creative, and useful in the up-building of God's kingdom. That is all God or anyone else can ask of you. Amen.

David N. Mosser, Salado UMC, Salado, TX 76571