

Psalm 123

1 To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
 2 As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he has mercy upon us. 3 Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. 4 Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

Matthew 25:14-30

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, 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.”

You are Gifted

West Asheville PC(USA)

How many of you are gifted people? ‘Gifted’ is a very loaded term these days, particularly in our school systems as it is used to refer to students with above average academic or athletic skills. My knowledge of the school system is a little antiquated and they may have found more politically correct terms to use than gifted, but whatever terms we use, they really mean the same thing: All people are not created with equal skills, gifts, abilities, etc. Some are born with greater gifts.

Saying to any group of people that they have the same human rights, same constitutional opportunities, same citizenship rights and responsibilities is appropriate in our nation, but those statements don’t mean that we are all created equally when we speak of skills, gifts, or abilities.

Today’s text from Matthew is about several things, but I believe it is primarily about trust and God’s gifts to us. Gifts that are not always equal in our lives, and that is a disturbing message for most of us.

The talent as a unit of money is the focus of Jesus' parable of the talents, and although it clearly represents a large sum of money, there is nothing to show

the exact value intended. This parable is the origin of the concept "gift, skill" as used in English and other languages today, and I believe that as we read this text we hear it to be about money, but we must also hear it to be about our gifts, our skills, our talents.

This story makes a bold statement that we are not created equal, despite our national creed. You know that you were not created equal in terms of physical talents, physical skills, or intellectual skills. That is a piece of God's genius in creating us for community. Corinthians tells us that by our different talents, skills, we contribute in equally important ways, but from unequal talents.

This parable tells of a man going away and he called his servants, or slaves, together and entrusted his property, **or money**, to them 'each according to his ability.' The story says they do not all have the same talent and it is also says **that is OK**. Each man still has a role in being stewards of the master's worldly goods.

Two of the servants take the money, or talents, entrusted to them and proceed to double the value of that talents. They clearly understood their task was to increase the talents in value. When the master returns and finds that they have doubled the value of his property, he is obviously pleased and rewards them for being good stewards.

The third servant doesn't respond the same way. He is afraid of the master and doubts his ability to increase, or protect, the property he is given, so he hides it in a hole in the ground so it will not be lost. He believes that if he loses the talent he has been given, he will be punished. But the servant misses the fact that the master trusted him to use the talent, **even if his investment should fail**. All of the servants might have invested the talents and lost it all. The master knew this was a possible result of his instructions, but chose to trust in his servants.

The third servant didn't trust in his master's faith in him, so he does nothing with the talent he has been given. I wonder how much we are like the third servant? Are we confident in the gifts, the skills, the talent that God has given us? Do we have enough faith in God's wisdom to risk **ALL** that we have been given as we work to serve God? Or do we hide our talents in the ground and pray when the Lord returns that will be enough

This church has many talents. The people of this church have talents for leadership, music, teaching, caring, joy, and worshipping God. You care about your neighbors, both those you know and those you don't. You give regularly to support the work of the church and to maintain the Church property. These are not things that can be denied, but how much do we trust God?

A constant question before every church is why do we exist? Is there a Church of Jesus Christ here because **we the people** think there should be a church here, **OR** are we here because **God called** a church into being?

If we are a part of a **Christ called Church**, then we need to believe that Christ has also gifted us, entrusted in us, with the gifts we need to flourish and live as Christ's church. Like the good servants, we are called to be good stewards of Christ's talents, using Christ's talents so that His treasure, his glory, might grow. We believe that God will lead this church where it must go to be Christ's church in this community in ten years, or twenty years, from now?

We don't talk about **IT** often in our tradition, but we serve a Risen Lord who is returning some day to gather up His people. He is a judge of grace and mercy, but we are taught there will be a judgment, there will be an accounting of Christ's gifts, talents, that we have been entrusted to use.

We need to ask **Are** we willing to risk our money, our talents, our skills for the life of this church, even if we are not going to be here to see that future? Or are

we inclined to protect our gifts, our talents against loss even if it means they become talents buried in the ground?

Everyone here knows that this church can't stay as it is forever. We are aging, and our financial resources are shrinking. Some of us will not be here in even TWO years, and if we don't risk what we have to be what God is calling us to be, there may not be a 'here' to enjoy.

Jesus said, "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." He is talking about faith in God, faith in God's plan for us and the world, faith that we have been given gifts to do God's work, and we must use them even at the risk of losing them. On that day I pray I can say I have invested all Christ's talents for his kingdom. On that day I pray Christ will gladly say, 'Well done, good and trustworthy servant.'

Amen.