

A Million Bucks
Sermon for East Craftsbury Presbyterian Church
November 13, 2011
Rev. Jim Stover

Text: Matthew 25: 14-30

Theme: Follow God's call, put God's gifts to work for God's Kingdom – and experience God's blessings.

I. This is not the ending I would have chosen

II. Two connected messages: since the Greco-Roman monetary unit a talent is the actual root of our English word "talent"...

A. Loving encouragement: Follow God's call, put the gifts God has given each of us into action, and experience God's blessings: the first two servants

B. Tough love: If in fear you turn away from God's call and hide God's gifts, you will not experience God's blessings: third servant

III. Contrasting stories

A. Master hands over to them all huge amounts of money

1. one talent was the equivalent to 6,000 times the daily wage of an average worker back then – 20 years worth of income. A huge amount, that is similar to our expression "a million bucks."

2. a great responsibility – more money than these servants had ever seen

B. Two very different reactions

1. The first couple servants react with joy and immediately go out and put the money to work

a) "Thank you, master, for giving me this amazing opportunity to do something for you!"

2. The third servant is terrified and wants to make sure he doesn't mess up and hides the money

a) "Why did my master give this great responsibility to me? I don't have a clue what to do here. If I mess up, my master will punish me! I'd better play it safe. I'll just make sure he gets his money back."

3. Hear the difference?

- a) Joy vs. fear
- b) This story is not about money, it's about the hearts of the servants

IV. Meaning

A. Jesus is telling this story to his disciples just days before he is taken away and crucified

1. Jesus is the master who is going away on a journey
 - a) Jesus will be arrested, killed, rise from the dead, and then go to heaven.
 - b) He said he would come back, but no one knows when
2. The servants are the disciples
 - a) When Jesus ascends into heaven, they receive the power and presence of Jesus through the coming of the Holy Spirit
 - b) they are also commissioned by Jesus to continue his work – they are given the precious, extravagantly costly gift of the Gospel
 - c) They are empowered with gifts for use to build up God's kingdom and commanded to go out and use them
3. This commission to continue Jesus' ministry and the empowering of the Holy Spirit for that mission have also come down through the centuries. We are commanded to use what God gave us to build up God's kingdom.

B. Jesus in this parable is focusing on the response of the disciples and those who follow them – including us – to his command to share the good news of God's love.

1. The giving of the "talents" in this story represents our commission from Jesus to continue his work here on earth
2. This is an awesome responsibility – similar to that of these slaves being giving millions of dollars of their masters money
3. Wow. So, what are we going to do with this responsibility, this call from God for each of our lives and for the life of our church? That's the central question here

v. Again, Jesus in the story, lays out two types of responses in the hearts of his followers: those who respond with joy and those who respond with fear

A. Joy: realize that each and every one of us has been personally called by God to be a part of the work of God's Kingdom here on earth

1. Wow! God loves all of us! Each and every one of us is valuable and precious to God!
2. God wants each of us to be a part of what he is doing here on earth! Each one of us has been asked to be a part of something that is so meaningful, so powerful, so awesome that it can and will change the whole world!

B. Fear: Why me? I don't want this commission, this call. I can't do anything worthwhile.

1. I'm too old; I'm too young; I'm too busy.
2. I don't have any great skills or talents or gifts. Nothing I can do is all that special. I'm just average, let someone else do it.

C. Fear is strongly condemned: Fear is the exact opposite of faith; it is the opposite of loving trust of God

1. It is a rejection of God's love for us. It is taking God's statement of our unique value and throwing it back in God's face.
2. It is a fundamental belief that God is not powerful enough to do anything good or valuable through us
3. This helps us understand the condemnation of the third servant – but doesn't make it any easier to swallow, since all of us sometimes are like that fearful servant

VI. Ultimately, the focus of this parable is on those of us who find ourselves in a place of fear, feeling like we have nothing to contribute – and we all experience that at times. But there is not just condemnation, there is also good news.

A. First, every contribution to the work of God's kingdom is precious and valuable in God's eyes, no matter how small or seeming insignificant

1. We are not all called to the same type or even level of work for the Kingdom

- a) Remember, the servants each received different amounts of money, different commissions – “each according to his ability”
- b) Remember Paul’s constant teaching about Body of Christ – the one Body that has many parts, each part having a different gift and function – but each valuable:

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function; so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12: 4-8)

2. Again, every contribution to the work of the Kingdom, no matter how small, is infinitely valuable:

- a) Greeting a visitor after church
- b) Being helpful to that flustered person in the store
- c) Sewing a blanket for someone who is sick
- d) Saying something nice to that one, lonely kid at school that no one wants to be seen with
- e) Keeping the church records organized

B. Second, we have to recognize that in this parable that Jesus is calling us – as individuals and as a congregation – to turn away from fear, to step outside our comfort zone, to take risks for the sake of God’s kingdom – and promising that when we do that there are great rewards.

C. But many of us simply don’t know what that might look like, what we should do to put God’s gifts to work for God’s kingdom. How are we to know, specifically, what God is calling us to do?

1. Sometimes it is very clear and connects clearly with the gifts, the talents, the abilities, the interests God has given us
2. Sometimes it's that idea, that thought, that image that just won't go away; that person's name who keeps coming up in prayer
3. Sometimes it's a surprising opportunity that just falls into our lap: My call to Croatia
4. In following the call of God, however it comes, we experience amazing blessings

VII. Conclusion

A. Recap

1. condemnation of living in fear and hiding away God's gifts to us
2. joyous rewards of putting God's gifts into action, however God leads us

B. Urge you to remember when you are tempted by fear that God considers each of us and what we have to contribute to the work of God's kingdom to be extremely precious and valuable, and God will guide us in using our gifts

C. If we remember this and respond to God's call then we, too will hear from our master, our Lord Jesus Christ:

I am so pleased with you. You received my gifts with joy and you followed my call to put them to work for my kingdom. Come and experience the all fullness of the goodness I have in store for you. Well done, good and faithful servant.