

## Without Fear

**Proper 28, Year A – Matthew 25:14-30**

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, November 16, 2014*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Okay, so just what *is* a “talent”? It’s a good thing that the monetary unit that the storyteller uses happens to be the talent instead of the shekel or the drachma or the denarius. If Jesus had said, “The master gave the first servant fifty thousand drachma...” thousands of preachers over the generations would have missed their chance to emphasize that God wants you to give of your time and energy and abilities – you know, your “talents” – in addition to your monetary tithes and offerings.

At the time Jesus told this story, a “talent” was a block of silver weighing somewhere between fifty and eighty pounds. It was a measure of payment equal to about twenty years’ wages for the average Joe. So in this morning’s lesson, the first slave was entrusted with a hundred years’ salary, the second was given the equivalent of forty years’ pay, and the third, twenty years’ worth. Rounding things off in terms of American median household income, that’s over five million dollars, two million, and a million – a pretty good chunk of change.

The first two guys apparently engage in some really creative investing, earning a hundred percent profit. Even if the master was gone for quite a while, that’s not a bad return in *any* century. But instead of doing something with the amount with which he had been entrusted, the third fellow digs a hole, lugs this big chunk of silver out into the yard, plops it in the hole, and covers it up again. When the master gets back, the third servant says to the master, “Here, take what’s yours.” The master has lost nothing, he should have no complaint, no claim against the servant. I would guess that the third servant expected the master to be angry at the first two servants, because they could have lost those huge sums of money just as easily as they gained them. They were betting against the odds, and they happened to get lucky. He, on the other hand, had kept the money safe, he’d been honest, and he’d given back the entire amount.

Perhaps if Jesus was teaching about prudent investment or sensible capital management, the third guy in the story might have come out all right. But Jesus was *not* teaching about investing or fiscal management – he was trying to make a point about courage and faith. Rather than being a faithful servant, Jesus says, the third servant is paralyzed by fear. “What if I lose?” “What if I’m wrong?” “What if I’m not a good investor?” He is frozen in fear, and so does nothing but hide what’s been given to him. And because of his fear, he is deprived of the future that might have been his, had he acted with faith and courage.

We live in what one author has called “the anxious society,” a society in which fear seems to be the operative, underlying factor. Much of our lives are driven by fear. We hoard up stocks and bonds and bank accounts as if there were no one in need or pain or despair. For what? For fear of want.

We build bigger houses and better office buildings and vaster storerooms. For what? For fear that we will not be remembered when we have gone.

We fill our lives with ever more busy-ness until, like the third servant we are paralyzed into no *real* action at all. For what? For fear that what we do is somehow inadequate – What if I lose? What if I’m wrong? What if I’m not a good enough?

As Christians living in this kind of culture, God has given our community a great trust, worth much more than twenty or forty or a hundred year’s wages. God has given us the Gospel, the Good News that says that, for *us*, the rules have been changed. The Good News is that we don’t have to *earn* love. The Good News is that we don’t have to *run* from death. The Good

News is that we don't have to pay and pay and *pay* for who we are and what we have done. The rules that the rest of our culture of fear follows are changed for us because we have been given the simple truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Oh, to be sure, we sometimes fall into the same trap as the rest of the world. Sometimes we Christians get to thinking that if we don't protect, if we don't demand, if we don't codify what is owed us, what rightfully belongs to us, we will not have what we need. And so we manipulate, and we legislate, and we cajole others, putting teeth into our demands if we must, holding others' feet to the fire if we must, until they have given us "our fair share." We take whatever we can demand, while finding ways to control every bit that might *leave* our hands. We say we need to "run the Church like a business" – forgetting that the business of the Church is to give away absolutely *everything* we have. And in the process, we sink further and further into the culture of anxiety, further and further into fear.

But as Christians, we are *called* to step *out* of that fear-and-failure frame of reference. As Christians, we are called into a *new* reality. We are called *away* from the fear of want, and *into* faith in the one who can and will provide our needs – and *through* us, can and will provide for the needs of those around us. We are called *away* from the fear of death and oblivion, and into the hope of eternal life – for *ourselves*, and for *everyone* who hears the good news from our lips or in our lives. Like so many foolish bridesmaids, we are called *away* from the fear of inadequacy, and into the joyful celebration of our absolute freedom as daughters and sons of the living God of Creation.

The blood that Christ shed for you and for me sets us free from those fears, *and* the thousand others that bind us. It's a priceless gift, this freedom in Christ Jesus – not just for the end-of-days and the sweet by-and-by, but for the *here-and-now* as well.

Do we claim such a gift by meticulously preserving it – without change, without growth? Do we accept such a gift by building bigger and more ornate fences around it? Do we honor such a gift by paying just what is demanded, by doing just what is required, by digging in and covering up and hunkering down? If *so*, we can concentrate on just keeping the doors open for those of us who know we are on the inside. We can make sure the salaries are paid, and keep the basic programs running. We can keep the roof from leaking, and we can keep the HVAC running, and we can even keep the brass nicely polished. Believe me, I'm all for every bit of that.

But if we *really* claim the promise that Christ bought for us on the hard wood of the cross, if we claim our rights and responsibilities as children of the living God of creation, if we claim his grace as freedom to live without fear, to live with the courage to really *act* in the name of Christ, we can we can be and *do* so much more.

With grace and courage instead of fear, we can reach further into the neighborhood around us to help the many who still live in darkness and despair, without hope, and with little else. With grace and courage instead of fear, by our direct action *and* in partnerships with other agencies and other churches, we can become messengers of God's love throughout our community, across western Kentucky, and even out to our nation and to our *world*. With grace and courage instead of fear, we can expand the special gifts that *we* have been given, by our Anglican heritage and our Episcopal outlook, to make sure that everyone, everyone, *everyone* knows that the God of love loves *every one*. With grace and courage instead of fear, *this Parish* can become a beacon standing on this corner, and each of us can share God's amazing, overwhelming love in a thousand *thousand* creative and enlivening ways that we have not yet even *begun* to realize.

Let it be so!