

Text-Matt. 25:14-30

PRAY-Dear God, guide us in taking a risk with the talents you have given us for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.

Our theme for today is “Fearless living with your money.” We know all too well the fear that money can create.

The cover article of the latest TIME magazine shows the presidential candidates. The caption reads, “JOB #1, THE ECONOMY.” An article names 4 anxiety benchmarks:

Housing with increasing foreclosures.

Banks and problems of reposing a house where property value is less than the mortgage.

Stocks and falling values.

Employment or the lack of it because of less spending.

But we don't need the TIME magazine to tell us our spending habits are changing. We know that from the price of gas, cutbacks in vacations and the empty parking lot at Bennigans.

One conclusion to the economic crisis is to cut back spending. We are to save, conserve and not take chances. We can look carefully at the difference between our needs and our wants. Such questions aren't bad. We can look at alternative forms of transportation and value relationships over money.

Such advice may reduce our fear over money. But our parable for today says, “Don't apply that thinking to our faith.” In the Kingdom of God we are to be big spenders. We are to be risk takers.

Please note this is a parable about the Kingdom of God and what we are to do as we wait for the return of Jesus Christ. It is not telling us how to invest our money. You do NOT want to listen to my advice on that subject. There are financial counselors to do that.

We are talking about the Kingdom of God which includes our money. In the Kingdom of God, the greater the risk, the greater the return. Don't be afraid. The worst we can do is nothing.

Let us look closer to see how this parable might lead us to that conclusion. The parable presents us with a problem. Why, why, why is the master so hard on the 1 talented servant? I feel sorry for him. "Have mercy on the poor man. Give him a chance." He didn't beat his wife, drink it away, or gamble it away. He did what most of us would do and played it safe.

Usually the little, overlooked person in the Bible is the hero: the despised Samaritan, the prodigal son in the pigsty, and the beggar named Lazarus.

In contrast we value bigness: the biggest hospital, the biggest airplane, city, bomb, steel plant, the newspaper with the biggest circulation or the biggest congregation in town. If it is big, it must be successful.

But Jesus is concerned about the insignificant and the unimportant: 5 loaves and 2 small fish, the tiny mustard seed, the widow's mite which is the smallest coin, lily, sparrow or a pinch of salt.

Jesus is giving us a new way to view life. Size and bigness are often a delusion. The small and insignificant have great possibilities.

Jesus was concerned about little ordinary people: the woman caught in adultery, the blind beggar, the little man named Zacchaeus. In other words God is concerned about little people like us.

We are the 1 talented people. The Kingdom of God is waiting to we what we become. It is a great sin to believe God can't use us. In contrast we can believe God is tremendously concerned about each us, like an entire community that stops to look for one lost child.

The problem is when 1 talented people think they/we are unimportant. God has plans for them and us. No wonder the master was upset with the 1 talented servant. God wants you and me to carry on the work of God's kingdom. God is waiting for us and is depending on us.

Many aspects of the parable point to the 1 talented servant.

The parable tells us our talents are gifts to be used. Some people have more talents than others, but that doesn't make them superior or others inferior. The point is to use the talents according to our ability. God doesn't expect more than we have the ability to produce.

The challenge of the parable is to be responsible with the freedom God gives us. The parable says, "after a long time" the master came and settled accounts with them. The master did not tell them what to do with their talents. They were to decide that on their own. In waiting we are to act and take a risk. In taking the risk we are trusting the potential of God's gifts.

The 5 and 2 talented servant doubled their talents. They received the joy of their master. Please note their reward was more responsibility rather than rest. "I'll put you in charge of much."

We are to take a risk in developing our talents. The worst we can do is nothing. It is a deadly sin to fail to use the potential God gives us. The self-delusion of the last servant is the tragedy of the parable.

Now let us return to the theme, "Fearless Living with Your Money." When we take a risk of investing our lives for the Kingdom of God, we have less fear of our money. We have a purpose in life bigger than our monetary concerns. The economy may force us to reduce our daily spending, but we are free to risk all for the Kingdom of God.

I will close with 3 examples:

Recently "Relay for Life" was held in B/N sponsored by the American Cancer Society." It was very successful raising over \$575,000. Communities across our country are doing the same.

The relay started small and built up over the years. The goal is to find a cure for cancer. That sounds impossible. But if each of us uses our talents, big steps can be taken. We can't do anything as others suffer.

Wednesday evening I attended a celebration of the Open Door Mission trip to Eypud, Ecuador. We heard inspiring faith shares and saw pictures of their work. They are the Good Samaritans we talked about last Sunday. Thank you for your spiritual and financial support.

Missionaries started working in Ecuador 40 years ago. They dreamed of having a church building, but it was only a dream.

Sam and Jeanette Douglass from Forrest, Illinois, belonged to a congregation in California with a strong emphasis in foreign mission work. The Pastor challenged them to go to the foreign mission field. After they thought about it and prayed about it, they said, "Yes."

While there, they took-in a poor boy named Manuel. He later became a medical Dr. dedicating his work to the less fortunate. Sam & Jeanette have returned to Ecuador on many missionary trips. Our mission team joined them a few years ago. Dr. Manuel facilitates those trips, and he was here on Wednesday evening. He is a Christian person of love and compassion.

The dream of missionaries 40 years ago was fulfilled in the dedication of a new church building at the end of this year's mission trip. The work was hard and risky. But God blessed their efforts.

The final example is from my own experience as a pastor.

Next week Karyl and I will attend the 125th anniversary of Zion Lutheran Church in Carleton, Nebraska. This was the first parish I served. It was part of a 3 point parish.

Carleton is a town of less than 100 people in south central Nebraska. It is big irrigation country. I accepted the call as an act of God. When we got there, we thought it was the end of the world, but it turned into a good experience.

My first call was special. They gave me, a rookie, a chance. If you had told me then that someday I would be on the staff of St. John's Lutheran church, I would not have believed it.

The pattern of that congregation was that a rookie would stay for 3 years, they would be vacant a year, a rookie for 3 years, etc. I was probably the 5th pastor to follow the pattern.

Such a pattern was depressing for the congregation. The members said, “The pastor leaves just when we get to know him.” However they also realized that over the years they trained many pastors.

Finally they got a pastor who stayed over 15 years. He is active in the church and community. How does he make it financially? His children are good students and receive good scholarships.

The talents of each of us is important. God has gifted us to take a risk for the sake of the Kingdom of God. God promises to multiply our efforts.

Recently I attended my all school reunion in NW Iowa. Two speakers at the banquet referred to the motto of South Dakota State University. That is, “You can go anywhere from here.” That’s a big statement. But it could be true.

I believe it is true of our Gospel. God wants to use our talents in unbelievable ways. God wants to say to us, “Well done, you good & faithful servant.” By the grace of God it will be so. Amen.