

**March 7, 2021**  
**“Twenty years from now ...”**  
**Matthew 25:14-30**

What “talent” do you have? In Jesus’ parable, each servant is given “*talanta*” (to use the Greek word). The Greek word has nothing to do with being able to sing, draw, or act. A “talent,” in Jesus’ day, was a measure of gold. Doing the math, five talents would be about \$5 million today, two talents about \$2 million, and one talent still a whopping \$1 million.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, only very, very, very few people were wealthy. These oligarchs relied on servants to run their estates. These trusted servants were not slaves, but managers who earned a good salary and got a percentage of the profits they made for their employers. When wealthy businesspeople travelled, trusted managers would oversee the estate.

Because these servants received a rare, personal gift (in this specific case, money), the word “talent” has come to mean a special gift possessed by relatively few people in English (thanks to the King James English translators, who just transliterate the Greek word into English).

How do the servants handle their cash? Two take some risks and earn great rewards. One, however, is cautious. He risks nothing; he earns nothing. I empathize with the third man. I am not a “natural” risk taker. What shocks Jesus’ hearers – and what shocks us still, is the master’s response. He is very angry with this third servant. Why? After all, he doesn’t do anything evil. He uses none of the money for personal gain. The principal is intact. Why is the master so upset? What do you think?

This is one parable Jesus doesn’t “explain” for us. He leaves us to mull it over. To pray about it. To take it into our hearts, and ask, what is Jesus saying to ME in this parable?

***What are our “talents”?***

Jesus says this parable to His disciples, right after He warns them, He will be killed and be raised again. As part of that conversation, they ask Him, “*What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?*” (Matthew 24:3). What might this parable have meant to them?

The Jewish people, since the call of Abraham thousands of years earlier, were blessed by God to be a blessing to other nations (Genesis 12:1-3). God had given them the special gifts of His presence, His care, and His help – for a reason. So they might be His ambassadors of His love to all nations. Unfortunately, the Jewish people never lived up to that ideal. They never shared His love with their neighbours. They buried the treasure of God’s love deep in their own cultural identity. Judaism became an ingrown, narcissistic, nationalistic religion.

Jesus knows the temptation for His disciples will be to hoard the good news of God’s love about Jesus, as well. Jesus has modelled love for ALL people – women and men, of all ethnic groups (what we would now call Europeans, Palestinians, Arabic people, Africans), all abilities (healthy people, ill people, crippled people), all ages (young and elderly), and all backgrounds

(slaves, free, including “notorious sinners and tax collectors”). Jesus is inviting His disciples to be just as outward focussed and just as all-inclusive about sharing God’s love as He is.

The wealthy man in this parable refers to God. And the various servants refer to His people – people like the disciples, you and me. He is challenging us to think about how we use the gifts He has given us. And this is where we can think of the more general use of what the word “talent” has come to mean in English. After all, the people to whom Jesus is speaking – His disciples – do not have much money. They would understand this parable is not really about financial planning. They would apply this parable in broader terms. They would understand Jesus is talking about the precious gifts God has given us ...

Here's are some gifts/talents to think about:

- **God has given you the gift of being human.** In Genesis, we learn we are each created “in the image of God.” We aren't cheap reproductions, clones stamped out in some cosmic factory. We are not random collections of elements. Each of us is divinely designed and given the God-beathed gift of life. Each of us is a gift of God. You are a gift to your family and friends (and we all have some), simply by being you. So be a friend. Be a neighbour. Be God’s gift of love to someone else.
- **God has given you the gift of the Holy Spirit.** God Himself is within you. When you love Jesus, the Spirit works within you to mold you to be more and more like Him. He helps us develop qualities of character of like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The Spirit is with you. Encouraging you. Teaching you. Correcting you. Guiding you. Inspiring you to reach out to people around you. When He gives a nudge to call someone or do something good for someone, be the gift of God to that person.
- **God has given you the gift of His love.** God loves you. You are His beloved child. He welcomes you into His family as His daughter or son. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, you have the blessing of eternal life with Him, now and forever. He blesses us with His grace, mercy, forgiveness. His invitation, then, is to extend the same gift of unconditional love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness to other people.
- **God has given you the gift of being unique, unlike any other.** In any family, from the same parents, various children can be so different. Each has their unique personality, talents, abilities, experiences, and skills. Each is different – but equally – immeasurably – valuable. The same is true in God's family, the kingdom of God. God has given us each something special. We have different things going for us – our innate abilities, education, finances, experiences, skills, and talents – these are all gifts from God. Teaching kids at school, cleaning bathrooms at the hospital, calling people in care homes, knitting baby blankets, helping with an oil change – these are all ways you can use the unique gifts God has given you.
- **God has given you the gift of opportunities that come to you and no one else.** There are people we’ve known for a lifetime – and people we only know for a

few seconds. But we have the unique opportunity to bless these people in ways no one else ever will. Each encounter with a person – whether at the check out at Superstore or when God does nudge you to call that old friend – can be a special gift.

- **God invests special gifts from His Spirit into our lives.** *"A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have."* (1 Corinthians 12:7–11)

Some of us can get tied in knots about "spiritual gifts." When I came to faith in the 80's, it was a big deal to discover your spiritual gift. The assumption was God had hidden some spiritual gift within you, but He deliberately made it a challenge to figure it out. There were "spiritual gift inventories" to help you discern the unique gift God had given you. If you couldn't claim one of the 12, 16, 18, 21, or 27 spiritual gifts (depending on what book you read), you were in serious trouble. If you weren't involved in a "spiritual" ministry in the church, you were a bad person. It all created a lot of guilt and a lot of (dis)stress.

That was an unhelpful, legalistic approach to the gifts of the Spirit. God's Spirit works in all of us, giving us experiences, education, abilities, skills, and opportunities to serve Him. Most of those will NOT be "spiritual," in the church. But they are immeasurably valuable. Our responsibility is simply to be open and obedient to His Spirit when those opportunities come, whether it's calling a long-lost friend or shovelling a neighbour's walk.

We all have been blessed by God: we all have abilities, education, finances, experiences, skills, and talents. Our responsibility is simply to be open to the opportunities we have to use those blessings to be a blessing to others. Some of us feel a bit awkward at this point. Other people may have things going for them, but we don't. Yes, you do. Be honest. God has blessed you with abilities, skills, and talents. Or, we feel like we're being proud or sinful to say we have something to offer. Once again, these are gifts from God. Embrace them. And be open to using them in His service.

### ***What is Jesus saying to us?***

How do we handle it when we feel God nudging – or pulling – us out of our comfort zone? Sometimes we will feel very comfortable doing what He leads us to do. Other times, it may be a stretch. Like the third servant, we may be tempted to stick our head in the sand (metaphorically speaking) and not take the risk. Can we be a bit braver, and take the risk?

- What happens if I call the old friend or the black-sheep relative I haven't called in years. It's embarrassing it's been so long. Will I take the risk?

- What happens if I do talk with that acquaintance or family member about my relationship with Jesus? It's scary. Will I take the risk?
- What if I do make a commitment to actually tithe to the church or give a regular special offering to a ministry? I'm afraid. Will I take the risk?

We can worry too much. Mark Twain once said, *"I have been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened."* Time and again, God says to us, *"Don't be afraid!"* or *"Fear not!"* It's by far the most common command in the Bible. So maybe we need to "fear not" and take a risk or two for God. After all, if God is with us, we're in a pretty good place. If things don't work out perfectly, so what? No one in Jesus' parable is punished because they risked and failed. The only person who suffers is the one who didn't risk at all.

There is another truth in this parable. The landlord **needs** his managers to be stewards of his estate. He's left his affairs in their care. For the Kingdom of God to grow, God needs us. He has placed His kingdom in our hands. If I were God, I would have chosen a different strategy to build my kingdom. But God chooses to entrust His work to people like us.

A critic once sniped at Stradivarius, the great violin maker, *"If God really wanted violins, he would make them himself."* Stradivarius responded, *"No, not even God can make violins without Stradivarius."* He may sound a bit full of himself, but he's right. It's not that God is not capable of making violins (there is nothing God cannot do). God **chooses** to work with very human, very flawed people, like Stradivarius. God is capable of solving global hunger, the Covid crisis, racial injustice, food security, poverty, and environmental issues on His own. He **chooses** to work with and through very human, very flawed people like you and me.

How has God blessed you? Don't wring your hands, and say you have nothing to offer. Thanks to God, you DO have skills, experiences, talents, and abilities that can be a blessing to other people. If you need to, ask some godly friends to help you.

Talk with Jesus about it. Identify one or two gifts – abilities, talents, skills, experiences you have. Remember your skillset is a gift of the Holy Spirit, given to you by God, and He will empower you, inspire you, and guide you as you offer yourself for use in His kingdom. Ask, *"What can I do?"* Then do it. If God is encouraging you to call someone. Just do it. Care for someone? Just do it. Support a godly cause for justice? Just do it. Pray for a friend or family member? Just do it. Knit a toque for a shelter? Just do it. Even if it's outside your comfort zone, take a risk. Don't allow the past to define your future.

Mark Twain also said, *"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."*

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Prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake,  
16<sup>th</sup> Century captain, explorer, and adventurer

Disturb us, Lord, when  
We are too well pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true  
Because we have dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely  
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when  
With the abundance of things we possess  
We have lost our thirst  
For the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life,  
We have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision  
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wider seas  
Where storms will show your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land,  
We shall find the stars.  
We ask You to push back  
The horizons of our hopes;  
And to push into the future  
In strength, courage, hope, and love.