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Proper 28, November 15, 2020
Matthew 25:14-30

I can't help but feel sorry for the poor guy who buried his single talent. I think he believed he was doing the right thing. How could he go wrong protecting what he was given and ensuring that he didn't lose any of his boss's treasure? But he obviously did go wrong. For his actions he is thrown into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. That seems awfully harsh.

In this parable and the ones we have heard in previous weeks, Matthew is telling stories about the end of time. The return of Jesus did not happen as his community expected. It has clearly been delayed and they aren't sure how to handle that. In these parables Matthew assures his audience that Jesus will return as promised. No one knows when, but it is a promise made that will ultimately be fulfilled. So the question is how to live while they await his return.

The servants in this story are given a sum of the owner's treasure before the owner goes away for a long time. He doesn't give them any instructions, he just gives to each one what he thinks they can handle. And they handle it differently. The first two servants take the money into the field and trade and invest it and double its value. The third servant instead digs a hole in the ground and buries the owner's treasure that was entrusted to him. Why do they act so differently?

The answer is in their perception of the landowner. The first two servants are willing to take a risk with the owner's treasure. They know that trading on the open market is risky. Sometimes you win sometimes you lose but there's no chance of growth if you don't take that

risk. They trusted the landowner enough to take some risks with his treasure and for that they were invited into a life of joy.

But the third servant was afraid of the landowner. He says, “I knew you were a harsh man.” His image of the owner leads him to play it safe and to protect what he has instead of taking the risk of fully investing it. It’s his own fear that creates his downfall and keeps him from entering into joy when the owner finally returns. For Matthew, the God we face is the one we imagine.

We all carry an image of God deep within us. Our ideas about God are one thing – what we say and profess to be true. But our image, our deep down sense of God, is something else worth exploring. Sometimes we don’t even realize that this private, deeply embedded image of God is different from what we profess. We might carry images of God as the enforcer, as stern and prone to punishment. We might see God as arbitrary and capricious. Sometimes we are like the third servant and we sense, deep down, that God is harsh. So, we live carefully and keep our hearts closed.

But Jesus is telling us this morning that burying our hearts away, living our lives in fear, will rob us of the joy of the kingdom. This parable points to the end of time, but it’s really about living. Yes, it is about being prepared to die and meet Christ, but in the meantime, and more importantly, it is about being prepared to live. Turns out the greatest risk is to play it safe, to live cautiously and prudently, to let fear drive us instead of trust in the God who gives us abundant life.

I wonder what risky and trusting ways is God calling us to this morning? Who do you need to take the risk to forgive or ask forgiveness of? Who do you need to trust with your heart

so that love may grow instead of keeping it tightly wrapped against any risk of being hurt? How might we resist that fear we all have of confronting our prejudices? How might God be calling us to be open to hear the experiences of people who look and act differently than we do? What risk might we take as a parish community, trusting that God wants us to share the life in Christ that we have been given?

Our answer lies in our faith in the God of love and compassion, the God who came to live among us and give his very life for us. Our answer lies in confronting any notion we hold that God is harsh and waiting to punish us. Our answer lies in our willingness to risk a deep and dangerous love that leads us to invest it in one another and watch it multiply.

This whole-hearted, risky way of living takes courage. St. Paul knew that - he urges the Thessalonians to encourage one another and to build each other up. My prayer for us this morning is that we can encourage one another to resist the fear that is swirling all around us. That we can reshape our image of God and carry deep within the God of love and compassion, the God of abundance and life. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for the wisdom to know God as the gracious giver of all gifts, so that we may live our lives with grace, free from fear. May we accept Jesus' invitation to live our lives as fully as possible, investing in one another, risking love at all cost, accepting responsibility for one another. May we be bold and brave, reaching high and caring deeply. And in living our lives this way, may we prepare for the ultimate banquet of joy.