

## The Foolish Investment

*“Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and upon my return I would have received what was mine with interest.” Matthew 25:27*

### I. The Context

For the past nine weeks, we have been on an extraordinary journey with Jesus through the Gospel according to Matthew. We started with the forgiven servant who would not forgive a debt owed him; Jesus’ historic final entry into Jerusalem; the story of the two sons; the wicked vineyard tenants; the ungrateful wedding guests with a man without a wedding garment; taxes to God or Caesar; the greatest commandment; woes to the scribes and pharisees; and five wise and five foolish virgins. This week, we will explore three slave entrusted with talents of gold and we will end this Christian year with a separation of the sheep and the goats. What does it all mean? Where is Matthew trying to lead his community and us? What does Jesus require of us?

### II. The Background

Jesus told the parable of the buried talent in a mixed company-Jewish leaders, disciples and the crowd. A man going away on a far journey entrusted his wealth to three slaves. To one, he gave 100 years of wages in wealth; to another, two talents of gold; and still to another, he gave twenty years of wages. Each was given responsibilities according to his ability. Then he went away into a far country. Eventually, the rich man returned and called his slaves to an accounting for their stewardship. The one with the five talents of gold, had doubled his master’s wealth. So too with the slave that had been entrusted with forty years of wealth. He had made forty years more. To each of these slaves, he said, *“Well done good and trustworthy slave, you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.”* Matthew 25:23.

Then it was time for the last slave who had been entrusted with the one talent of gold to give an accounting for his stewardship. “Master,” he said with a smile on his face, “I knew you to be a meticulous and tough man when it comes to handling your wealth. You collect where you have not labored and you earn where you have not accumulated by the sweat of your brow. I was afraid of losing your talent, so I went and hid it in a safe place. With a proud look of expectancy, he said, “Here is what you entrusted to me safe and sound.” The master’s face wrinkled with rage and he said, *“You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and upon my return I would have received what was my own with interest?”* Matthew 25:26-27. Then the master did what seems to be a harsh and unexpected thing. He took the one talent that was entrusted to that slave, gave it to the slave who had been successful with the greatest amount and had the frightened slave cast into outer darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I ask you this morning, what do you suppose was the reaction of the mixed crowd of Jews around Jesus? What is your reaction as you hear this parable re-told? If you were called into an accounting for your stewardship of time, talent and treasure right at this moment, how would you respond? I do know this, that the parable is about God and his expectation of what we do with our stewardship of God’s time, talent and treasure.

### III. Five Reactions

My first reaction is to the master/slave paradigm. The times and relationship were certainly different from ours. We do not live in a time in which there are masters and slaves. We can not even conceive of such a time. If there are any conquering and dominated peoples today, one could not conceive of the conquerors entrusting their slaves with such large sums of money; let alone expect them to be still there upon their return. Rather than a slave/master society, we live in a country of “We The People,” with a government of the people, by the people and for the people. We are blessed to live in one in which there is an ever expanding and inclusive concept of freedom and democracy.

My second reaction to the parable is that to find persons with different abilities and different talents, squares with the reality that I know all too well. I do not know why that is the case, but I do not universally attribute the reason for the differences either to a capricious God or to the laziness of most people. It just is that way, as it was with the man born blind that Jesus healed. I think that each of us should only be concerned with being as good a steward as possible and responsible in developing our gifts to the best of our abilities while sharing our entrusted blessings with one another.

My third reaction is to the two kinds of slaves. Certainly, when a person utilized his/her talents, gifts or possessions to the best of his/her abilities, she/he is to be commended. It is remarkable what some persons living with disabilities are able to do. Most of them put those of us who are differently able to shame. And, it is quite frustrating to watch people who have all of the rudiments of capability not use their gifts and talents wisely. For the ones who do not use their talents wisely, God does not have to cast them into outer darkness. They live, move and breathe in it by themselves all the time.

The third slave listed fear as the hindrance to his lack of financial venturing. On the one hand, with the downturn in the financial markets and the loss of capital today, one can certainly empathize with that third slave. Add to that the fact that expert investors do not know what they are doing and you have a massive reason for us all to be fearful. On the other hand however, we know that to hide our monies away in a so called “safe place” or to invest them unwisely are sure ways of having them depreciate or totally disappear .

I know of only two ways of reacting to such fear. One is to be paralyzed and frightened by fear. Now, that is to live in a state of weeping and gnashing of teeth. There are many persons living in that state this morning for one reason or another. The second way to respond with faith and hopeful expectation before a loving God. St. Paul’s sought to encourage young Timothy with these words, *“Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of hands; for God did not give us the spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.”* II Timothy 1:6-7. May we also be so encouraged!

My fourth reaction to the parable is to the master’s conclusion that the third slave was wicked and lazy. It doesn’t seem to follow from the evidence in the rest of the parable. It seems rather harsh to me. Nevertheless, we do not know the original circumstances of the parable nor the reason why Jesus allowed it to be couched in such language. Perhaps after chiding the pharisees and leaders in the crowd for the past nine weeks of lessons, Jesus is not letting the persons who perceive themselves as having one talent off the hook. And we do know that the reason why some persons do not make good in life is because they are either wicked, lazy or both. Nevertheless, it is amazing what the so called one talented persons can do, if they simply develop and use what they have.

**My final reaction to the parable of the distributed talents of gold is to come full circle back to the main conclusion whether we are talking about time, talent or treasure. If you do not use it you lose it. God expect us to exercise our gifts to his glory and to use whatever gifts we have to the best of our abilities. In so doing, we show our adoration, thanksgiving for and gratitude to God for the gifts with which we have been entrusted.**

#### **IV. A Reflection**

The Rev. Tamsen Whistler of Trinity Church, St. Charles wrote, *“Adoration is like seeing a fine play or reading a fine poem: It enlarges our world and frees us from the need to be in control.”* Perhaps besides fear, a desire to control was the third slaves worst presumption. Tamsen continues, *“Thanksgiving flows from prayers of adoration, yet gratitude doesn’t happen without our noticing the gifts God has given to us. Moreover, gratitude creates space for God’s gifts and allows for those transformations that the gifts demand of us.”* Her theme for this Sunday was to be Those transformations in light of fear [of the use of] talents as we enter into the joy of the reign of God.

#### **V. An Eleven Weeks’ Summary**

Thus for ten weeks, we have been traveling with Jesus on his extraordinary final journey into Jerusalem. In instructing and chiding Jewish leaders, his disciples, the common people of Israel and us, he has brought us closer to understanding his Father’s Kingdom. Jesus concluded the parable of the Investment of talents by saying to the trustworthy slaves, *“Well done you good and faithful slaves, you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.”* Matthew 25:23.

What I think that it all means and what God requires of us is that God expects us to use our gifts wisely. What Matthew meant by including this parable was to help his community to work to the best of their abilities in bringing in the kingdom of God in a mostly Jewish/Christian environment.

Here’s wishing each of us trustworthiness, greater stewardship, joy in the master’s presence and a Happy Thanksgiving as you and I seek to make wise use of our God given time, talents and treasure.

Let us pray. Dear Lord, giver of all good gifts: grant us the faith to trust totally in you; the wisdom to develop and invest our gifts wisely and the freedom to live joyous lives both here and in the life of the ages. Amen.