

Entrusted

Matthew 25:14-30

Judges 4:1-7

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“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘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.’ And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘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.’ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘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 on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Judges 4:1-7

The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. So the Lord sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goiim. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly twenty years.

At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.’”

What talents do you have? Are you a good singer, or do you have some artistic flair? Are you an adept administrator or an exceptional teacher? Are you known for your hospitality, generosity or creativity? Are you an amazing cook, or do you have a knack for sports, sewing or soldering?

Naming our talents can feel somewhat awkward so we are reluctant and shy to answer. We can feel as if we are bragging, whether we are thinking of the natural God-given aptitudes, skills, traits and characteristics we have, or we use the ancient biblical term ‘talents’ as a monetary value. If asked about our talents, we may prefer to speak about someone else’s talents rather than our own in order to not feel boastful, and instead humbly acknowledge another’s gifts.

Whether we choose to say aloud what our talents are---and we all indeed have many—it is important to recognize, name and claim our talents. Our talents are the raw materials God gifted us with for our lives. They are gifts of grace with which we have been entrusted to use not just for our own sake, but for the very purpose we are uniquely here. Several years ago Mary Schramm wrote a book entitled, *Gifts of Grace: Discovering and Using Your Unique Abilities*, in which she suggests that there are five steps in discerning and using your gifts.

The very first step, she said, is to discover your gifts, and interestingly, this is something we cannot really do on our own as our gifts are discovered through our relationships. What are things you love doing or the unique idiosyncrasies that make you---you? What makes you feel the most alive? It is through our parents, siblings, friends, teachers, mentors and others that we learn and see just what God has entrusted to us. It takes others for us to learn what is inside of us, to help us tap into our talents. There were things that were noticed about us when we were young, the seeds of our talents were pointed out to us, and hopefully encouraged in many ways.

The second step is to accept and use the gifts that God has uniquely given to you, and equally, do not seek the gifts that God has not given to you. We are each our own talented sum total of life experiences, skills, and aptitudes. There is a maturity to this acceptance, as it requires not becoming envious, jealous or boastful. We can marvel at others’ gifts and wish that they were ours. We may wish we were more extroverted, or more creative than pragmatic, yet we have been entrusted by God for a particular purpose and so given particular talents. It requires the grace to recognize that some people can do something well, yet most of us are here to admire, appreciate, what others can do. Oscar Wilde’s truism echoes here, “Be yourself, everyone else is taken.”

The third step is to enjoy your God-given gifts. Take pleasure in them, appreciate what God can do with and through your life. One of the purposes of our talents is to use them for our own contentment, our own enjoyment, our own self-care. Savoring your abilities is an expression of gratitude to God.

The fourth step is to mature or develop those gifts. Our gifts are raw materials that need to be developed, strengthened, and encouraged. It takes commitment, time and energy to move from a native talent to the talent that is for your purpose in the world. Like Michelangelo, we must carve the marble to see the angel free.

The fifth step is to surrender all your gifts to God, to use the gifts and talents with which you have been entrusted for your calling. To truly live the life you were created for requires you to discover, develop and use your God-given resources to make the world a better place. To do any less is wasted opportunity. Erma Bombeck left us some sage advice, “When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, ‘I used everything you gave me.’”

All of us have an abundance of God-given gifts, although not in equal measure, as our purposes vary so much from person to person. There are a range of entrusted abilities, as the difference is about the purpose, the use of those gifts.

In Jesus' parable in Mathew's Gospel, there are three servants entrusted with a measure of the Master's wealth, proportionate to each of their abilities. Each were given resources, they did not need to do anything to earn, nor even deserve, what the Master chose to give to them.

The first servant was given five talents, the value of fifteen years wages. This was a person extraordinarily gifted, someone who would be in an influential position of mentoring, leadership or management. Deborah, a married prophetess and the only female biblical judge, was one such person who would have been gifted, blessed and entrusted with five talents. As a priestess, she preached and lead worship services. She is known for her courage, wisdom, faith, poetry and action. She is indeed an example of a servant who had received five talents and immediately went off and traded with them, used and invested them wisely in ways that were creative and inspiring, so that much was gained. She could stand eagerly, boldly and proudly with the Master to say, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' There is sense of joy in her servant heart, as she shows the Master what she has done with all that she been entrusted with. She would then hear those words of appreciation, 'Well done, good and trustworthy one; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

The second servant was given two talents, the value of six years wages. This middle servant, this average servant, is just as eager to go off and use, invest, develop the talents with which he or she had been entrusted. I think it is important and interesting to see that there was not a jealous competition between the five-talent-servant, and the two-talent-servant, as each was content with the talents entrusted to them, and how they could benefit the Master. The second servant wisely used the two talents, so that they were doubled, and with a servant heart was also intently anticipating his or her efforts to be received with the affirmation, 'Well done, good and trustworthy one; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

And then there was the third servant, the one who received a single talent, the value of three years wages, and buried it into the ground. Whether embarrassed or jealous, the gift was not enough for this servant who rejected it as meager and miserly. This became a litany of excuses and a wasted opportunity to do something of value and importance with his or her talent. This third servant denied the gift of grace received, took no pleasure nor appreciation in it, and did not develop it into something meaningful. This servant's whole outlook was one of scarcity, of shortage, so that possibility became grief.

In this season of Stewardship, and as we prepare to receive our pledges next week, I invite you to think about your talents, the gifts, skills and abilities with which God has generously entrusted you to make the world a better place. Jesus' words, "For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance," is a life truth for everyone. The more gifts, resources, abilities that God has given to each of us, then the more of that life God requires of us as well. We are to discover, enjoy and strengthen the talents with which we have been entrusted, and use them for good. Amen.