

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost ≅ Year A
Saint Paul's Episcopal Church
November 13, 2005

Fear Not

Lessons for the Day

- ✘ Psalm 90
- ✘ Zephaniah 1: 7, 12-18
- ✘ 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-10
- ✘ Matthew 25:14-15, 19-29

Homily

I greet you in the name of **God our Creator**, **Christ our Brother**, and the **Holy Spirit** who sustains us and empowers us to love and serve them both.

Amen.

Today's Gospel lesson -- the **parable of the talents** -- is so familiar that most of us could recount the outline **from memory**. And we've probably heard it preached ad nauseum . . .

In fact -- by show of hands -- how many of you have ever heard one sermon on this parable? How many have heard more than one? I thought so . . .

We have **heard this parable preached ad nauseum**, often on a tack that reinforces our workaholic tendencies and celebrates success and return on investment as a -- if not the -- primary spiritual virtue.

And I'm afraid **that's missing the point**. But what is the point?

One commentator remarked that a **parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."** What heavenly meaning might we tease out of this story -- a story that, at least on the face of it, seems to be more about judicious investing than about anything else?

Fred Horton remarked that, "**Every parable is offensive**. If the parable is not offensive to you, then you've missed something. And **the key to understanding the parable for yourself is to ferret out where the parable offends you.**"

I don't know about you, but **I can tell you exactly what offends me about this parable**. The poor guy who only **got one talent** -- and who only got one talent because, evidently, he was also short on "ability" -- **is the one who gets in trouble**.

There's just something so wrong about all this. It's like **piling-on** in football, like **kicking someone when they are down**. He's already **short on abilities** (you know he **would have been chosen last in the schoolyard games** of his time), the master **only entrusts one talent to him**, and **then he gets in trouble**.

Come on, **give me a break!**

(As I listen to myself preach, **it's pretty clear I have found the part of this parable that offends me!** J)

The parables -- both in the time in which they were told and in the time in which we read them -- are not so much moral tales as they **are stories designed to help see the world differently**. They **get us off balance**, they **shake up our priorities** so our priorities can settle down -- in the best case -- more in line with God's priorities.

So what can we -- what can I-- learn from my unease with the apparent injustice in the parable of the talents?

Let's **take a brief look at the central character in this parable -- our one talent friend**. What did he do, and why did he do it?

As Jesus says in the Gospel lesson:

"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.' " Matthew 25: 24,25 (NIV)

"So I was afraid . . . " Our **one-talent friend was afraid**, and his fear paralyzed him.

Well what did he fear? He **feared his Master**, and apparently with good reason. He cites his Master as "a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed." **Sounds like fear was a rational choice** when relating to this fellow -- **I'd fear him as well**.

But what about us -- you and me -- **where can we find ourselves** in this parable? **Let me suggest a couple of ways we might find ourselves in the story** -- or at least a couple of places that I find myself.

I fear that I am a one-talent servant -- chosen last on the playground of life and consigned to be always less-than the brothers and sisters I see around me?

I fear my Master -- and my Master is not the God of all creation but **the values of the fallen world around me**.

I fear being ridiculed when I haltingly articulate my faith.

I fear that -- if I give my money or my time or myself away -- **that there "won't be enough"**. **I live out of scarcity mentality, afraid that God will not provide for me**.

I fear the life of faith -- afraid to jump wholeheartedly into the arms of God.

I fear my fears -- afraid that, because of them and how they paralyze me -- God will one day say to me, "You wicked and lazy servant!"

Does any of this fit for any of you? I know this is an Episcopal Church -- and I know it's early -- but can I get an "Amen" here?

And yet, that's not all these is to this life of faith.

And yet, **in the midst of all these fears** -- in the midst of enough worries and fears and neuroses to make any therapist rich -- **I also know that my Redeemer lives.**

I know that, " . . . **God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, to that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.**"

I know -- and **I want you to know** -- that **God is not the harsh master of the parable of the talents.**

Our God is a God who loves you far more than you dare hope or imagine. A God of grace and mercy. The God who made you, knows you, loves you, and wills only good for your life. The God who loves you holy and wholly, always and in all ways.

Fear not. Be of good cheer. You are not a one-talent servant. You are the precious child of a loving God.

Now go forth to share that good news to a dark a hurting world!

Thanks be to God! **Amen!**