

Sermon for Proper 28A  
Sunday, November 19, 2023  
“Invest in God’s Bank”

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Most of you know that I celebrated my 55<sup>th</sup> birthday a few weeks ago, and when you turn 55, you get really serious about securing your future for retirement. Now my own retirement is still a ways off. The Episcopal Church imposes mandatory retirement at age 72, and clergy are automatically invested in the Church Pension Fund to make sure that we have a little nest egg for when that time comes, but even though that’s still 17 years from now for me, how I can invest in my future is has become a necessary reality for me to deal with. The Parable of the Talents, which is the theme of our Gospel lesson today is a lesson taught by Jesus in investing in our future.

Once again, we are told an allegory—a story with an important religious or moral message where the characters and events lead us into a deeper understanding of our relationship with God and his relationship with us. The lectionary seems to be bombarding us with allegories and Jesus liked using allegories as illustrations for his followers to understand the point he was trying to make.

At the time in which Jesus lived and when Matthew wrote, a *tálanon*, which is the Greek word from which we get the word talent, was a measure of weight that was used to compare currencies. It converted into different amounts in different places, but a silver talent was worth about 6,000 denarii and a gold talent was worth about 180,000 denarii. In dollars, that would range from around \$200 to \$1,000 dollars; thus, five talents would be between \$1,000 and \$5,000 dollars. That was a lot of money—far more than what the average person would have earned in a whole year, perhaps even a lifetime! The man going on a journey might represent Jesus. His going on a journey might represent Jesus’ ascension. The slaves might represent Christians who were awaiting the Second Coming. The talents might represent the blessings (financial, social, intellectual, athletic, etc.) that God bestowed upon them. The man’s return might represent Jesus’ Second Coming. And, the master’s assessment of the faithfulness of the slaves might represent Jesus’ judgment of humanity on Judgment Day. One way that we might interpret these connections is that if we use our blessings given by God to transform the world we will be rewarded in the end; if we do nothing with our blessings, they have little to no meaning and we might as well be taken away and cast into the outer darkness. We are to be good stewards of God’s blessings. The Christian community for whom this gospel was written was eagerly awaiting the return of the Messiah, so this parable was, for them, a foreshadowing of the end times—preparation for the final and ultimate retirement, if you will.

Usually when I’ve thought about and preached about this text, I’ve focused on the talent aspect of this parable, but how many times have you been told, “Use the talents that God gave you for something good.”? And, that *is* one way we can look at

this passage. But there's something else to note about this parable. The Parable of the Talents isn't just about talents; it's also about trust and confidence—trust and confidence in God to bring about an increase in our lives. I'm not talking about having more money, I'm talking about an increase in our faith. I'm talking about an increase in our devotion. I'm talking even about an increase in our confidence that God is always faithful to us, has our back, and will be with us wherever we are right now.

The master in the parable gave an amount to his servants according to the ability of each one and upon his return, he asks for an account of what they have done. Two of them doubled what they received, but the third, out of fear, buried his talent and returned it just as he had been given it. The guy in the parable who buried his one talent did not trust in the master or himself; he let his fear and anxiety get to him and he did not see the trust that his master had placed in him; instead, he considered his master to be a judge and did not trust in his goodness. The other servants trusted in their master. They accepted the things they were given, took a risk, and their risk paid off and in the end the master rewarded them for trusting him.

These days, we have many things that are causing us anxiety. Everything seems to be getting more and more expensive. This is not new, but it seems like the rise is happening faster than ever before. It's harder to pay our bills. It's more difficult to get services that used to seem so easy. It takes longer to get a doctor's appointment. There are fewer and fewer services to help give us a break. Our communities are feeling less safe, violence seems to be on the rise. We have to worry about identity theft, people scamming us out of our savings; people stealing our packages from off our porches; subways and buses that aren't running when we need to get to where we're going; when is Access-a-Ride really going to pick us up—if at all. And if that's not enough, the whole world seems to be collapsing. Government can't seem to get its act together and agree on anything that helps common folks like us. Politicians are being nasty to each other to get us to vote for them. Terrorism and terrorist groups are wreaking havoc around the world and the reality of war is destroying people and the places they live. The future that we had hoped would be secure seems to be increasingly in jeopardy.

But this morning, thanks to the lectionary, we have heard the Parable of the Talents, and the Parable of the Talents is inviting us—no, begging us—to invest in God, not man. If we are going to survive the bombardment of adversity, distress, negativity, and destruction day after day, we need to take the risk invest in God's economy to increase our endurance, strengthen our confidence, deepen our faith to know that when we let God be our head investment fund manager, things *will* work out, we *will* survive. In fact, we will come out on the other side stronger, better, healthier, more secure, and liberated. Trust frees us; fear paralyzes us.

Today you will be receiving information about the financial realities of doing ministry here in our parish. The numbers are real and pretty scary. It takes a lot to run this place and we seem to always be chasing our tail trying to pay for it every month. Your parish leaders—the wardens, vestry, and the rector—are very concerned about our future and how we will survive. Our security sometimes seems impossible. We are

unable to do more ministry because we don't have the people, and the people we do have are tired and just aren't feeling church anymore. But, if we just look at a bunch of numbers on a page or a handful of people in the pews and think that we can't, that we are already stretched to our limits, and that we don't know where it's going to come from, then we have already lost the fight. We've lost the fight because we're trying to depend on human economy instead of investing in God's economy; we're being like the master's slave from the parable who received one talent and buried it in the ground. Guess what, it made no money; it did not increase. Instead, we must put our confidence in God. We need to take the few talents that God has given us and let God strengthen us to double it. We need to believe that God has already provided for us.

You see, God wants us to trust in him, not simply in ourselves. Now we have to make the effort. We have to take the risk to do more, offer more, help more, and pray more. When I was growing up, the old folks at church used to say, "If you take one step, God will make two." Simple wisdom, but that's exactly the message of the Parable of the Talents. If you make one step, if you take a risk and give us a little more, if you take the risk and support the ministries that we do have, come to the masses and events that we are putting on, but also think out of the box and start a new ministry, if we take the one step, God will turn it into two—or three, or four, or five.

Let's stop talking about starting a new feeding ministry to the needy in our neighborhood and actually get together and plan a start date, figure out how often we're going to do it and where to get the materials. I bet there are folks who are interested in doing this. And if you're wondering where the money is going to come from to start it, Episcopal Ministries of Long Island is begging congregations to ask them for grant money. Let's stop talking about ministering to our children and youth and actually get together with a plan on when and how to teach them about the Bible, our faith, and our traditions. There are even resources online to get us started; let's pray to God to give us the wisdom to do this. Let's invest in God's economy.

A few weeks ago, an idea came up from our Saturday Bible Study group, made up primarily of our sisters and brothers who attend the 9:30 Mass, of a lay-led home prayer group where people get together in each others' homes or even here at the church, and pray for each other, pray for the needs of the nation and the world. Not a replacement of the Prayer Circle that already exists that ministers to people who are ill and focuses on that person's needs, but an opportunity for the faithful to get together weekly, perhaps, and pray with each other in whatever language you need to speak to God in, give your worries over to God and let God handle it from there. Maybe there's an opportunity for the two groups to work together, too. This is an investment in God's economy.

Worrying about money and talking about it all the time isn't going to grow our church; in fact, it will actually drive people away. But creating more community will grow our church. Making each and every person who comes here feel like they belong to something beyond themselves will grow this church. Making this space a holy and safe space where you leave the world behind and come to be in God's presence will

grow this church. Truly believing that investing our talents in God's economy will grow this church—and the five talents will become ten. Thirty people in the pews will become sixty, one hundred-twenty. Why not two hundred-forty? But we have to make the first step; it's not going to happen if you bury your one talent in the ground. And if we allow this place to dwindle, then we *will* have gone into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The good news is that we already have the talents. You are the talents. You are the currency. From you and in you is already the potential to turn five talents into ten. You just gotta believe in yourselves, and most importantly, trust God to give the increase. Our mission here at All Saints is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord by our participation in the Eucharist, our fellowship in oneness and diversity, by respect for each other, and through outreach into the community. Let us commit our mission to God and watch what happens! Let us continue to transform each other and the world, as today's gospel tells us, by trusting God to give the increase and watch the blessings multiply. Amen.

### Resources

“Talanton” in <http://biblehub.com/greek/5007.htm>.

Pope Francis, Angelus Address (Vatican City), Sunday, November 19, 2023.