

Talent/No Talent

[Matthew 25:14-30](#)

Today's stock market is all about taking risks. We are asked at various times in our lives how much risk we are willing to take as far as our money is concerned. For those of us getting close to or who are already in retirement, our tolerance for risk is very low. We know we need money for retirement otherwise we need to keep working. So we don't want to risk our funds by placing them in a volatile stock market. We are encouraged to play it safe and keep our money as accessible as possible.

You didn't think this was going to be an investment sermon, did you? I think the principles will be played out so bare with me. For those of us who are not retiring for a while, we can accept a little more risk and invest for the long term, knowing that over time our returns should be favorable. A

factor that led to our recent downward spiral in the stock market was the massive number of folks that gave into their fear and sold stocks in record numbers, trying to save a bit of their investment. Most advisors would have talked you out of selling stocks in a bad market if you are someone who can see the big picture and look at the long term view of things.

Now what in the world does that have to do with today's scripture lesson? We are introduced to a parable where a master goes away for a long trip and leaves a substantial part of his wealth in the hands of his servants. It appears his servants at that point become more like his investment partners. The fact that they were entrusted with any of the rich man's wealth is very unusual. We are also told later that the master is someone who does not reap what he sows. It seems the master is very accustomed to making money another way – through a type of

investing. The master leaves his wealth in charge of his servants, with the expectation of a return on investment.

Two of the servants understand the master's intentions completely. We are not told what they do, but clearly they are pretty savvy, for they both were able to double their investments – a 100% return. Not too bad! I'm sure a lot of us would like to have those odds in our favor! The third servant was completely paralyzed by his fear. He could not even consider the risk of investing his talent because he stood the chance of losing it. Hence, he simply buried his talent, did nothing with it in order to guarantee he would have something to give his master when the master returned.

Fear – it can be all consuming. It can literally freeze us in our tracks, like a deer in the headlights. I'd like to present a list of the names of some medical conditions and see if you can

guess what the fear is that is noted – they are all fears diagnosed by psychologists (shared by Cameron Horsburgh).

- Peladophobia – fear of baldness or bald people.
- Aerophobia – fear of drafts.
- Porphyrophobia – fear of the color purple.
- Chaetophobia – fear of hairy people.
- Levophobia – fear of objects on the left side of the body.
- Dextrophobia – fear of objects on the right side of the body.
- Auroraphobia – fear of the northern lights.
- Thalassophobia – fear of being seated.
- Calyprophobia – fear of obscure meanings.
- Stasbisbasiphobia – fear of standing and walking.
- Odontophobia – fear of teeth.
- Graphophobia – fear of writing in public.
- Phobophobia – fear of being afraid.

A lot of people handle fear in different ways. Some are so afraid they become completely driven by their fear. There are those of us that are so afraid of failure, we work 3 times as hard as the next guy to hedge our bets, so to speak. Some are so afraid of various things, like dogs or bridges; they go to extremes to avoid encountering anything that will make them

face their fear. Some become completely paralyzed, like the deer in the headlights, unable to do anything – their fear literally consumes them.

Some folks have experienced their fear with the downturned economy. We are so afraid of not being able to provide for our families, we may respond in one of the ways mentioned. We may be driven to work harder, we may be avoiding the fear by refusing to even consider the possible options, or we may be paralyzed by our fear and not able to do anything. But today's scripture lesson tells us to place our fears aside and move on to do the work our God expects us to do. There are risks involved, but we are called to face our fears and take the necessary risks.

So what am I talking about? God has entrusted us with talents. I think it is no accident that the unit of measure used in today's parable is called a talent. The first two servants used the

talents they were given and ended up providing a substantial return for their master. They risked it all and won. The third servant didn't risk anything and he lost. So where is the third option? Where is the one that says the servant took his talents, risk them all, but lost? We have definitely seen this in the recent problems with the economy. Plenty of folks risked their money and clearly lost it if they did not see the economic problems coming in advance. But we are not talking about simply making money in this parable. We are talking about risking our talents to share God's love with others. When we take that risk, when we extend our hand and say 'yes' to God, when we agree that there is a large harvest but we will be among the few workers, we cannot lose. It's one of the few guarantees in this life!

So what are our talents? What gifts have you been given by our Master that you can use to further God's kingdom? We've

talked about some things in the past but I believe they bear repeating. The starting point is a relationship with God. We begin by accepting that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But even in our sin, Christ came to earth to die for our sins in order to pave a way for us to receive the gift of eternal life. We are challenged to keep watch and do good works while we are here on earth in order to show others the way to the cross as someone probably showed us at some point. Think back to your Sunday school teacher or your parent or grandparent who brought you to church so you could experience God's love for yourself.

But what comes next? We need to invest our talents to share God's love with others. What are some talents you may have? Are you a teacher, a musician, a caregiver, or someone who can visit the sick? Are you interested in helping our young people?

Are you gifted with computer skills or graphic skills? Are you a cook or seamstress/tailor? Are you a good host/hostess? Are you an evangelist or a missionary? Are you a prayer warrior? Perhaps I have gone through this list and you are convinced you do not fall into any of those categories. That's ok. There are many talents we can use to serve God. The key is to listen to what God is calling you to do. We are all presented with gifts and talents from God and we are called to return a portion of those gifts and talents back to God.

Well, we started this message with some notes about investing. Many pastors have used this parable to talk about stewardship, which is also important as Jesus spoke many times about stewardship, tithes, and money in general. I believe stewardship includes our money and funds for certain missions and projects, but stewardship also encompasses our talents.

When we join the church, we pledge our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service. We pledge our talents to God. All things come from God. Let us not become consumed with our fears that we are unable to do the work God has put before us. Let us invest our talents, take the risk and seek to lead souls to Christ through our witness. We are the only Bible some people will read. Let us not bury our talents in the dirt – let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us so that when we face Jesus we will hear the words, “well done, my good and faithful servant.” Amen.