

Well-Invested: Faithful

Matthew 25:14-30

Unrealized Potential

The world is full of people who have great potential, but never realize it.

There are school children who don't apply themselves, athletes who don't try very hard, actors who waste themselves on drugs or alcohol, and business people whose careers end in disappointment because their values are all askew.

The world is adrift with wasted potential.

Failing to engage life to the best of one's ability might very well be the gravest sin of all.

After all, doing one's best with what God has given is a matter of stewardship.

Do Your Best with What God Has Given

I have always tried to live life just that way—doing my best with what God has given. I come by that honestly.

My parents were forever encouraging us to do our best, whether it was at school, on the athletic field, or whatever it was.

As I grew in my faith, I came to realize that I am a creation of God who blessed me with certain gifts and graces. While I never was destined to be a starting point guard in the NBA, God provided in other ways.

God never demands from us abilities we don't have. He does though demand that we use to the fullest the abilities we do have.

The great distance runner, Steve Prefontaine, once said, *"To do less than your best is to sacrifice the gift."* Steve Prefontaine

God has richly provided and stands to help us maximize the very gifts he has given.

So for me, doing my best with what God's has given is a deeply spiritual response.

How I live life, how I invest myself is a matter of stewardship and a return of thanks for the great things he has done.

God's Investment in Us and Our Investment in Him

The parable we read just a minute ago called the Parable of the Talents, is all about investment and, to be frank with you, is all about stewardship.

The parable talks about God's investment in us and, in turn, our investment in him and his Kingdom.

Our story for today spotlights a man who in preparing to leave for a trip entrusts to his servants a part of his wealth. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to still another one.

During the days of Christ a talent of silver would have been the equivalent of fifteen years wages. So what the master entrusted to his servants was a big deal, no matter how much they got.

As the story goes, the man who was given the five talents went off at once and made five talents more.

The one who was given two talents did likewise and doubled what he was given.

The man who was given one talent went and dug a hole in order to hide his master's money.

Upon his return, the master commended the first two for what they had done, while condemning the third for what he didn't do.

The scolding of that third servant serves as a wake-up call for those who refuse to engage in the things God wants them to do.

The refrain, *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many. Come and share your master's happiness!"* (Matthew 25:21) has rung through the ages.

It gives us a sense of what God expects, particularly when it comes to conducting Kingdom business.

"Well done, good and faithful servant" is often quoted at funerals. It's a great way to commend those who have invested well in the Kingdom.

All He Did Was Nothing

The focus of our parable for today is not so much upon the amount given or the amount made, but on the investment itself.

While the parable focuses on all three servants and how they performed having been entrusted with a portion of their master's money, it's the third servant though who grabs our attention.

We look at that poor guy and think, *"He doesn't seem so bad. After all, he didn't do anything."*

Therein lies the problem. All he did was nothing.

In our heart of hearts, if we are truly honest with ourselves, we realize we're just like him.

In sharing this parable, Jesus essentially called out the nation of Israel and, in particular, the Scribes and Pharisees for their lack of fruit.

He calls us out as well.

Israel had been entrusted with so much, but had little to show for it. But then again, isn't that true for us as well?

Sitting in judgement, as we often do, we are quick to look down upon that third servant.

"He could have at least tried," we say. *"Anybody can come to the plate and take a swing. You're not even coming to the plate."*

As the story goes, the third servant didn't do anything with the one talent he was given because he was fearful of what his master might do if he came up short.

So he chose to do nothing.

We too choose to do nothing for fear that we might fail as well. We fear we might be looked down upon if we take a strong stand for Christ. We fear we might be re-buffed. We fear we might otherwise lose what we have worked so hard to attain.

I shared a few weeks back a quote from C. K. Chesterton that has held my attention for a long time now, particularly when it comes to making disciples.

"If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly." C. K. Chesterton.

When it comes to making disciples, somewhere along the line, we will need to put our fears aside and decide to just go ahead and give it a try. We may not be very good at it at first, but God will bless our willingness and our efforts.

Even if you are a one talent guy or gal you'd do well to invest yourself in furthering God's Kingdom. After all, that's what God wants you to do in the first place.

We can sit in judgement on that third servant all we want, but in the end it comes to us to face the fact that Jesus is talking about us as well.

We too are much like this servant who took what was entrusted to him and did absolutely nothing with it. We are entrusted with the greatest message of all and yet keep it to ourselves.

When it comes to investing in the very things that expand the Kingdom of God we are all too often content to sit on the sidelines and refuse to engage.

Some persons in reading the Parable of the Talents are taken aback by the harshness of the master and how he dealt with the third servant.

We can react to that anyway we want, but what really upsets God is a wasted life, where very little is invested, particularly in the things of his Kingdom.

Simply put, God sees a wasted life as opportunity lost and it upsets him to no end.

It should come as no surprise to any of us that the two servants in Jesus' story were commended for what they had done.

It's as if Jesus is saying that this is the way you should live, particularly as a citizen of God's Kingdom.

We are to invest ourselves in rightly, doing all we can with what we have. We are to leverage our talents in support of what really is important.

Use It or Lose It

The old adage rings true, "*Use it or lose it.*"

- If we fail to exercise, our muscles will atrophy.
- If we don't read or stretch our minds, we will end up dull and lifeless.
- If we don't put ourselves to the things of God's Kingdom, we'll never reap a harvest and our souls will grow dim.

Christ seems to be saying with this Parable of the Talents that the only way to keep a talent is to invest it. We'd do well to heed that advice.

Every one of us has a lot to invest.

After all, as stated in Psalm 139:14, "*We are wonderfully and beautifully made.*"

Do you believe that about yourself?

Oikonomics

A few years ago, I ran across a book by Mike Breen and Ben Sternke called, *Oikonomics*.

Interestingly, the two list five capitals that every one of us has the potential to invest.

- Spiritual—the currency is wisdom and power
- Relational—the currency is family and friends
- Physical—the currency is hours and health
- Intellectual—the currency is concepts and ideas
- Financial—the currency is money

The first is spiritual capital, the most important. The currency of this capital is wisdom and power.

The second is relational capital. The currency is family and friends.

The third capital has to do with the physical. The currency of this capital is hours and health.

The fourth capital is intellectual with a currency of concepts and ideas.

The final capital is financial and has to do with money and possessions.

The world has things inverted. Far too many consider money as the most important capital of all. God sees things differently.

Spiritual capital is the most important. It is the very thing that should head the list of the ways we invest ourselves.

When we invest ourselves financially, intellectually, physically, and relationally, all with a spiritual goal in mind, the possibilities are limitless.

Investing Your Time in the Work of God

Those who seek ordination in the United Methodist Church are asked a set of historic questions that date back to the days of John Wesley.

They go right along with what we have been talking about today in regard to investing ourselves for the sake of the Kingdom.

They are apropos for every one of us—whether clergy or lay.

“Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God? Will you observe the following direction? Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time.”

Investing Your Time in the Work of God

How are you investing your talents—the talents God has given? The answer to that question goes a long way toward answering the way you’re living your life.

I have heard of pastors who have given everyone in the congregation a twenty dollar bill and then ask them to go and do with it what they want—all for the betterment of the Kingdom.

Some will invest their \$20 in helping someone. Others will try to increase the investment by seeding some sort of fundraiser.

People are then asked to come back and share how the Kingdom benefitted.

I don't have a \$20 bill for you today, but I do have this assignment—go and invest yourself and see what increase God gives.

I think you'll be overwhelmed with what he can do through you.