

Proper 28
Year A 2023
Mt 25:14-30

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life.

Amen.

As I am more involved in the financial aspects of my retirement, I equate today's gospel with the master's retirement plan.

In recent discussions with investment managers, I've had a few "come to Jesus" talks.

The general theme is the potential for greater gain equals my comfort in investing in funds where the greater payout involves much more risk.

This is not my comfort zone to be sure.

However, my desire to begin retirement is increasing nearly minute by minute.

In essence, I'm told if I want to "double" my money quickly, the numbers are not in my favor.

I'm told somewhere in the neighborhood of 1 out of 4 or 5, at the very best, will succeed.

The remainder will likely lose most of what was invested.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells today's parable in the last few days of his life.

He has made the decision to leave Galilee where he had been travelling, preaching, and healing.

He made the decision to go to Jerusalem where the religious leaders will see him as a serious threat.

Likewise, the political authorities will see him as a disrupter.

Today's parable is about a wealthy man who leaves on a long journey.

Before he leaves, he gives three of his slaves different sums to oversee while he is away.

One slave is given five talents, another two and the third slave is given one talent.

This is an enormous amount of money.

One talent was worth about 6,000 denarii.

One denarius was payment for a day's labor.

So one talent is roughly worth 20 years of labor.

This is a staggering amount to give to a slave.

The first two slaves each invest their talents and proudly report to the man when he returns that their investments have doubled.

The third slave has not fared as well.

Although, he has not lost any of the funds
he hasn't increased them either.

The third slave is clearly a member of the Wib Garfield investment club.

This man isn't bad.

He hasn't disobeyed any instructions
as to the safeguarding of funds while the man was away.

He's simply cautious, prudent.

The man is proud that he has
all of the money entrusted to him,
he hasn't lost any of it.

But, the third slave slips up a little bit.

Instead of simply handing the man his talent
he decides to explain his thinking
on his "investment" strategy.

"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."

Well, that doesn't go over well.

The master lashes out
calling him wicked and lazy
and reprimanding him for not
investing his talent with the bankers
so that he, the master,
would realize double the value when he returned.

The slave is then thrown into the outer darkness.

Which as you might suspect, is very very bad.

All of the commentaries that I reviewed
say that this parable is not really about
doubling your money or accumulating wealth.

Instead, the parable is meant to encourage us to take risks.

We are meant to reflect on Jesus' life and the risks that he took.

In the words of one commentator:

The greatest risk of all, is not to risk anything.

*To not care deeply and profoundly enough
about anything to invest deeply,
to give your heart away and
in the process risk everything.*

*The greatest risk of all, it turns out,
is to play it safe, to live cautiously and prudently.*
(John Buchanan)

Are you familiar with sloth?

Sloth was one of the ancient church's seven deadly sins.

Sloth means not caring, not loving,
not rejoicing, not living up to the
full potential of our humanity,
playing it safe,
investing nothing,
being cautious and prudent.

In essence, digging a hole in the ground
and burying all that we have,
all that we are,
and all that we could do
to change the condition of our world.

To turn a blind eye to injustice, hatred, and violence.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that
the sin of respectable people
is running from responsibility.

Bonhoeffer took his own responsibility so seriously
he joined the Resistance
and helped plan an assassination attempt on Hitler.

Bonhoeffer's sense of responsibility cost him his life.

How important is it for us to risk, to invest,
to live into our full potential?

Jesus, in today's parable,
implies that playing it safe,
not caring, not loving passionately,
not investing ourselves,
not risking anything –
is something akin to being
banished to the outer darkness.

For most of us, our personal faith
does not seem like a high-risk venture.

For many of us,
our personal faith is the opposite,
it is our comfort zone.

In the words of John Buchanan:

*Faith, many of us think,
is about personal security here and in the hereafter.*

*Faith, we think is no more risky
than believing ideas in our heads
about God and Jesus,
a list of beliefs to which we
more or less subscribe intellectually.*

*Faith, we think,
because that is what we have been taught,
is getting our personal theology right
and then living a good life by avoiding bad things.*

Religion we think is a pretty timid non risky venture.

But Jesus invites us to be disciples.

To live our lives as fully as possible
by investing them,
by risking,
by expanding the horizons of our responsibilities.

To be a disciple, Jesus says
is not so much believing ideas about him
as it is following him.

It is to experience renewed responsibility
for the use and investment
of these precious lives of ours.

It is to be bold and brave,
to reach high and care deeply.

Where do we, as the community of St. Andrew's,
fit in in today's gospel?

Are we the slaves who are successful in their investments?

Are we the cautious slave?

Where do we individually fit in today's gospel?

Have we played it safe,
not caring, not loving passionately,
not investing ourselves,
not risking anything?

Today is a good day to take time to evaluate
both personally and communally.

Today's parable is the invitation to the adventure of faith:
the high-risk venture of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.