

Sermon for November 13, 2011

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Early this year, in one of our weekly meetings, Elizabeth asked me if I would like to preach some Sunday. I paused, thought about it and said “sure”. It was not until this Summer that we picked the date, November 13.

So after our meeting I went to the lectionary and looked to see what the readings would be and began the process of thought, prayer and reflection that led to my words today.

I love the Gospels and look forward to the Gospel reading each Sunday. It has always been the teachings of Jesus that have moved me in my life – What is Jesus saying? Why did he say it? What does it mean for me personally?

Today’s Gospel is told in parable. Like so many of the parables it is about the nature of the Kingdom of God and our relationship with God. Jesus tells us that the master entrusts his property to his servants “to each according to his ability”. That would suggest that the master has faith and trust in his servants and also that he has different expectations of each of them. We know how it goes for the servants with 5 talents, 2 talents and 1 talent. The servants behave as they do and the master rewards them accordingly. There is a lesson here for each of the servants to ponder and reflect on - even the poor servant with only 1 talent.

I would like to focus on two aspects of this parable – ***Faith*** and ***Risk***. In the parable the master shows great faith and trust in the servants. He gives them money to hold for safekeeping and leaves on a journey for a very long time. These servants are “slaves” to their master so it strikes me how this master has such faith in them. Secondly, the servants take risks with the master’s money knowing that he is a “harsh man” as the parable tells us. Why would they take those risks?

I connect strongly with this parable. In my own life, I have been entrusted by God and others with so many gifts in this life and as I get older have come to understand the responsibility and joy of sharing those gifts with others, be it love, faith, hope or as in this Gospel “treasures”.

Throughout my life, in the best of times and the worst of times I have always had ***Faith*** that “things would get better”. Through personal challenges in relationships, job changes, health issues, family dynamics or sorrow I have had ***Faith*** that God would provide the answers to the questions that would show me the way through. In my experience, prayer, reflection and time have healed wounds and restored relationships.

I know my experience has not been the experience of many on this earth. Many suffer greatly and have lost their **Faith** and hope for a better future. As in today's Gospel, God gives many of us the ability to help those in need when they are not able to help themselves. How can we take our own 5 talents or 2 talents or 1 talent and multiply them tenfold for the sake of humankind? What are the talents that we have to give? Are we willing to share our talents with those in need? How can the strength of our own **Faith** serve those who suffer and have little **Faith** in their lives?

In his book "The Heart of Christianity", Marcus Borg talks about **Faith** as "the way of the heart". He goes on to say that there are four meanings to **Faith**. **Faith** as belief – The affirmation that God is real, the centrality of Jesus as the way to know God and the Bible as the word of God, **Faith** as trust – Living free of anxiety and worry, **Faith** as fidelity – Loving God, self and our neighbors in relationship with each other and **Faith** as vision – seeing reality as gracious with all its warts, suffering, pain, beauty and forgiveness.

As Marcus Borg so eloquently describes it, it is our own understanding of **Faith** that is key for us to be prepared and able to serve those in need and who suffer in this world. Sometimes that suffering happens in our own families, with friends or among us here at St. Andrew's where we can be there for each other.

The other aspect of this parable that struck me was **Risk**. The master in the parable takes a risk when he leaves his money with his servants and goes on his journey. The servants take risks when they trade with and invest the master's money. As the story goes, those servants who take risks are rewarded for their efforts with abundance and the one who takes no risk loses all.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus gives us examples of taking risks in his own life and teachings. He was a risk-taker when he over-turned the tables of the money-changers in the temple. He was a risk taker in his teachings on the Kingdom of God that flew in the face of the Jerusalem authorities. He was a risk-taker when he condemned the Scribes and Pharisees and called them hypocrites and again he was a risk-taker when he rode into Jerusalem at the Passover knowing that his time was coming to an end. Jesus doesn't often talk directly about taking risks in the Gospels but he clearly demonstrates it in his life and actions.

We too are called to take risks in our own lives, with what we have been given, by doing more with those gifts than to use them for ourselves. In my own experience the greatest risk has often been saying "I'm sorry or please forgive me for what I have said or done to you." The reward for me then becomes the joy of love in relationship.

What looks like a great risk to one person may not seem like a risk at all to another. Look at the servant with 5 talents in contrast to the servant with 1 talent. Their

perception of risk was totally different. One doubled the master's money and the other buried it in the ground. Since this is a parable, we know that Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God so abundance or loss is not about money or possessions at all but about the abundance and joy of our relationship with God or the alienation and loss of that relationship.

Perhaps our views about **Risk** are, in fact, tied to our understanding of **Faith**. The greater our understanding of how **Faith** works in the Kingdom of God the less powerful the idea that we are taking a **Risk** has on us. With **Faith** we are able to understand our relationship with God, live a life free of anxiety and worry, be true to ourselves and others and experience the grace that surrounds us.

This community at St. Andrew's has experienced tremendous **Faith** and taken enormous **Risk** in expanding this beautiful church, calling a new Rector and sharing this place with others as we continue to grow as a parish.

As our journey unfolds, we can ask ourselves – "Where do we fit, as a community, in this parable right now?"

Are we a community of **Faith** willing to step out and take **Risks**?

What do we, as a community, believe the end of the story will be for St. Andrew's?

Amen.