

Rev Rita Message Nov 15 2020

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus tells a story about a Master who, as he is about to go away on a journey, summons his three servants and entrusts each with a portion of his assets. To one servant the Master gives five talents, to another he gives two talents, and to the third servant he gives just one talent.

Talents were considerable sums of money. One talent was equivalent to about fifteen years' worth of wages for the average worker of that time and place.

As Jesus tells the parable, the servant given five talents invests and doubles his assets, as does the servant who receives two. Both took significant risks, both were aggressive. When the Master returned, both were praised, given even more responsibility, promoted, and invited to share the joy of the master.

But the third servant has a different story to tell. You see, he was a cautious, prudent fellow. He has observed that the Master is a tough businessman and will not be pleased if the principle is lost.

So, the third servant digs a hole and buries the money in the ground, which was, in fact, a perfectly reasonable thing to do if he did not wish to be liable for any loss.

When the Master returns and calls upon this servant to give an account of himself, he says in good faith that he is able to return to the Master exactly what was entrusted to him. He can account for it down to the last penny.

Now, maybe he's expecting that the Master will be pleased that he neither squandered nor risked the Master's principle. True, no great gain was achieved, but no harm was done, right? The cautious servant must be assuming that the Master will invite him to join his fellow servants in entering into the joy of the Master.

But here comes the twist in the story that must have stunned Jesus' listeners.

Jesus tells them that this prudent, judicious, sensible, practical, careful, cautious man was treated very harshly by the Master. Not only was his single talent taken from him and given to the other successful investors, but on top of that, instead of getting his invitation to the big party, he is unceremoniously thrown into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Who would have guessed that could be the outcome? Just because he was practical and sensible, he's tossed into darkness? Just because he was cautious and careful, he's thrown out to weep? Just because he was fearful of failure, he's consigned to the corner reserved for teeth-gnashers? Who saw that coming?

The word "talent" means money in this parable and at the same time it has another meaning.

The word "talent" can also refer to a person's innate ability or aptitude or gift to accomplish something. With this story of the talents, Jesus was using the language of money to make a point that each and every one of us has gifts... skills... abilities talents that God has given to us to be used to make a positive difference in the world.

God has given us resources of money, ability, time, and energy. We have also been entrusted by God with the responsibility to offer these "talents" to use them to increase a wealth of love, compassion, healing, hope, and goodness in this world.

The good news is that we don't have to win American Idol or the Great British Bake Off or the Next Food Network Star to prove that we are talented enough. In God's eyes, in God's talent show so to speak.... We are

all winners. God wills our good, wants our best, and loves each one of us with an unconditional, never-ending, relentless love. And when we embrace those divine facts, our lives will overflow with meaning and purpose.

Once upon a time there was a famous house builder and painter. After designing the homes, he would then build and paint them. As a painter, he was such an amazing artist that he didn't even need drop cloths. He had a steady hand, and he was finicky about using good brushes and quality paint, so there were no drips, just tight trim lines.

This craftsman always designed, built and painted the homes all by himself—with his own hands ... but then one day he had remarkable idea. As he was standing by one of his houses, he saw a bunch of kids walking home from the local elementary school. They were minding their own business, laughing and carrying their backpacks, until he shouted, "Hey, kids." When they looked up, startled and awestruck (because everyone in town knew about his amazing skills), he asked them a surprising question: "How would you like to do some painting?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you what," he said, "I'll give each of you a bucket of paint and a brush, and you can paint my new house. Do you want to give it a try?"

"For real?" they squealed with delight.

The painter nodded as he said, "Yep, for real."

"Cool!" the kids said.

He opened up the back of his truck and pulled out a load of brushes and paint cans and then pried open the paint cans. They started splashing paint on his garage door. They got paint on the sidewalk, too, and some on each other. But they also got a lot of paint on the house—all different colors, especially on the parts of the house that were under 4 feet high.

As other kids came by on the sidewalk, they asked, "Can we do that, too?" And they joined in. In about an hour most of the first floor was now covered with paint.

The house painter's neighbors came over after dinner and took it all in. "What is going on?" they asked. Another blurted out, "Look, I gotta be honest, your house looks like a tornado ripped through Sherwin-Williams. What were you *thinking*?"

"Well," the house painter said, "of course I could have painted this house all by myself, but I've always built and painted houses in order to bring joy to others. So based on that goal, this is the most beautiful house I've ever made. Then dozens of their friends will want to come to this house. They'll bring their friends to show what they've painted. And each one will say, 'This is the home of the master painter and builder, but it's also our house.'"

In the same way, when God, the master creator and painter of the world, pours out his Holy Spirit on his followers, he hands every single one of us a can of paint and a brush, and he says, "Go to work. Use your gifts and let's paint a beautiful house for the world."

Thanks be to God. Amen.