

Homily November 19, 2023  
Matt 25: 14-30

Jesus tells a parable about someone entrusting his income and assets to his managers while he went away. He expected them to look after his affairs competently, and so he gave to each that which he thought they were able to deal with well. Obviously, each had different abilities and consequently he gave more to one than to the other. So he expected different levels of returns from each. What he didn't expect was for them to do nothing at all with the wealth. That would have meant years of missed opportunities and lost investment returns. He was not amused when he got to the fellow who hadn't done anything, even though he hadn't actually lost it. He hadn't tried. One suspects that if he had tried honestly and lost it because what he tried didn't work, that the owner might not have been rapt but he would have recognised his attempt. We may not all have the same level of ability and skill, or even the same talents, but we can put in the same degree of effort. And this fellow hadn't.

Isn't it the case that the more we use a particular ability, or part of our bodies, the more efficient and able we become in that area? If we walked, we could walk further; if we carried the groceries, on the whole, we could continue to carry them. If we did complex mathematics, it became easier. (At least, that's the way it used to be.) However, if we sit around all the time, like I do, we find going up hill a challenge. Use it, or lose it. We all know about that.

And, haven't you heard the old saying, "If you want something done, give it to a busy person."? The more efficient you are, the more responsibility you will be entrusted with (or lumbered with, according to your level of burn-out). Jesus' parable was using all of these well known facts.

However, since a parable is an allegory, at least, and at times a paradoxical challenge, Jesus wasn't just telling a story to entertain. What was he illustrating? The stories told in the previous sections of Matthew's Gospel were often about being prepared, and being ready to work for the Kingdom. Jesus wasn't expecting people to hear, understand and do nothing. We've also, over the past few weeks, heard readings about the two Great Commandments, and the Beatitudes. Jesus was expecting people to remain attentive to God, and to understand that love of God and people was God's primary essential characteristic and expectation. To put these understandings and expectations into practical application was to demonstrate that understanding. If we don't love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, then we can't do the rest. So, to the extent to which we do love God totally, we are able to love others. We are able to spend our talents for God's benefit. But, love is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling.

When I was a psychologist with the Education Dept I was an Employee Adviser and was having my first meeting with the district's Principals. One, who was at the top of the pile and knew it, (he was a nice fellow) a Principal of a large high school, was 'making me feel at home' by patting me on the head and talking about sending teaching staff along to see us advisers for our 'soft and fuzzies'. I smiled and said, "Yes, the teacher being under such strain that he/she had done everything that they could think of to fix the problem but it hadn't worked, so they came along to you (indicating their principals) and you did everything you could think of, but nothing helped, so you then send them along to us for our '*soft and fuzzies*' with the expectation that we *would* fix it. And, on the whole we do." Love can be very difficult; it can require skills and hard work. It doesn't always fix the problems. Sometimes what is needed is simply walking alongside someone, listening to their pain, doing the small things that matter. And even these can be difficult and tiring when they go on for a long time.

The manager who gave back the single talent may have thought that it was too little to do anything with. He may have been afraid of losing it, therefore thought it was better to at least preserve what he'd been given. However, to take a little, and open our hearts to God's loving nudges, can have enormous consequences.

A young Buddhist nun in Taiwan, Master Cheng Yen, last century, was upset by the plight of the poor in Taiwan who would be turned away from hospital, no matter how much in need, if they couldn't pay a fee. So, she asked her friends and supporters to deposit, daily, a few small coins from their daily grocery money, into a bamboo container. Out of that beginning, through constancy and word of mouth, over the years, she has now provided free-to-the-poor public hospitals, a college of medicine for doctors and nurses who are trained not only in medical skills but in compassion, also. They are expected to respect and care for their patients as if they were their own relatives. And this has been just the beginning of what is now an international aid agency, and bone marrow bank.. This Buddhist nun has never been out of Taiwan because she cannot fly due to a heart condition. This began because this young nun allowed her heart to be touched by the plight of the poor, and decided to see what a few small coins each day could do. It's so similar to what Mother Teresa of Kolkata did when she picked up a dying man, put him in a wheelbarrow, and pushed him to a hospital that would take him and then - staggeringly, I think - went back for the next person.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, "If you believe small is insignificant, try sleeping with a mosquito."

There is a delightful poem by Spike Milligan that goes like this:

"Smiling is infectious; you catch it like the flu,  
When someone smiled at me today, I started smiling, too.  
I passed around the corner, and someone saw my grin.  
When he smiled, I realised, I'd passed it on to him.  
I thought about that smile then I realised its worth,  
A single smile, just like mine, could travel round the earth.  
So, if you feel a smile begin, don't leave it undetected  
Let's start an epidemic, quick, and get the world infected!

God doesn't expect us to do what we can't. We're old (at least most of us are). In bits and pieces we're infirm, as well. We've done the heavy lifting already and while some can still do it most of us can't do it anymore. But most of us can smile. We can have a chat with the person on the check-out. We can sit and have a cup of tea with a friend. Or, add something to the grocery basket for those with little to eat. Some of us can still knit beanies, or grow vegetable, fruit and herb seedlings for Rev Jane's garden for the refugees. Some of us can still work at our career tasks. You get the idea.

But, also, at this stage in our lives, we can love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind (and what little strength we may have left). We can make sure we attend to God throughout our day. We can set a little reminder alarm on our watches, that reminds us to waste time with God. We can share the beautiful, the funny, the sad, the delightful, with God. We can love, because God gifted us this love, to be used, not buried.

To love beyond self enlarges our souls. Looking at the sunrise and sunset, listening to the crickets and frogs, sitting with a scripture passage with a receptive, flexible mind, repeating a favourite prayer, taking those for whom we are concerned into deep, contemplative prayer within our inner being, are all ways of loving God with all our souls.

It is an unfortunate effect of past church teaching that people still, at times, put their minds into park when it comes to their Christian beliefs. We mustn't question because that's doubting. Well, Jesus was not too impressed by the Scribes and Pharisees who would never vary the Law to fit the circumstances. Love didn't seem to have much of a look in for those who equated their relationship with the Lord to the keeping of the Law in all its life-limiting detail. And this applies to our Christian beliefs, too. Our minds are God-given. They weren't given to be buried in a field and dug up later to be handed back to God unused. God is not so feeble that God needs to be pacified by unquestioning assent. There's a difference between a child who obeys a parent out of fear, regardless of whether they understand or not, and one who obeys out of love with understanding because they've asked questions until they *did* understand. So, we need to use our minds., including our reason; question what we don't understand, and keep on questioning as our understanding changes, as we grow into deeper knowing. Our minds need to be used, even if we feel they may be getting a bit rusty.

So, for the love of God, and the love of the people and all else with which we share this earth, God's creation, we have the pleasure and delight to use our talents, skills, hearts, souls, and minds, in the love of God who loves us with all God's mighty heart, and longs to share our/God's everyday moments together.

So, let us pray together a prayer by St Ignatius of Loyola

**Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding,  
and my entire will,  
all I have and call my own.  
You have given all to me,  
To you, Lord, I return it.  
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace.  
That is enough for me.**

**Amen**

[Remember: copy of St Ignatius' prayer for Brookfield - 25 copies

Image of Spike Milligan's poem - Google image - on screen for homily]

### SMILE FOR YOU

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I thought about that smile then I realized its worth,  
A single smile, just like mine could travel round the earth,  
So, if you feel a smile begin, don't leave it undetected  
Let's start and epidemic quick, and get the world infected!

Keep the smile going by sending this on to a friend.  
Everyone needs a smile!



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