

## The Lord is Looking for Spiritual Entrepreneurs.

*A sermon preached in Christ Church, Aspen, by the Rev. Bruce McNab.  
26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. Proper 28, Year A. (Text: Matthew 25:14-15, 19-29)*

There's nobody more respected in American culture today than a successful entrepreneur. They're the heroes and heroines of capitalism, business world counterparts to the saints, the heroes of faith we talked about last Sunday.

The entrepreneur starts out with a good idea, then works hard and takes the risks to convert that good idea into a hugely profitable success. —Think about Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford or Thomas Edison in an earlier generation and people like Bill Gates, Wayne Huizenga, or Oprah Winfrey in our day. These are people with brains and talent — but maybe not much money to start out with — who built incredible businesses. In a town like Aspen, you can run into entrepreneurs every day. Why, we've got a bunch right here in our own congregation... maybe nobody quite like Henry Ford or Bill Gates, but still cut from the same cloth —just a smaller pattern.

Jesus' parable of the talents is one of those stories everybody knows, even if they don't read the Bible very much. It's a part of scripture that's embedded in our culture, in our folklore, like the parable of the Good Samaritan. You don't even have to be a Christian to know Jesus' story about the three servants whose master gave them his money to manage. —In fact, this parable became internalized in our culture so long ago that it loaned our language the word "talent" itself.

I mentioned entrepreneurs earlier because in the parable of the talents Jesus seems to be offering compliments to people who show an *entrepreneurial attitude*, people willing to take risks in order to be successful. Look at the story. An obviously very rich man goes away on a long journey and gives three of his high-ranking slaves money to invest on his behalf.

According to Jesus' story, the man gave one slave five talents to invest, another two talents, and another one talent. A "talent" was a unit of weight — of anything really ...iron, copper, bronze, silver or gold. The most common monetary reference was to a talent of silver, and that's probably what Jesus had in mind here. A single talent of silver was the equivalent of about 16 years' wages for the ordinary worker. That was a lot of money. Let's compare it to today's economy: in 2004 the median income in Colorado for a family with one wage earner was about \$40,000 a year. Sixteen times that is \$640,000. That's not chicken-feed! And that's the modern value of just *one* talent. That was the amount the rich man entrusted to the number three guy. *Five* talents would be worth \$3,200,000 — 80 years' income for the average person. So the rich man gave his three slaves some serious money to work with while he was gone.

When the master returned from his journey — probably years later — he called in the three slaves and asked for them to report on what they had done with the money he gave them to invest. The first two — the five-talent man and the two-talent man — had doubled their money. Obviously they had to take some risks in order to make a 100% profit. Investing was no more of a sure thing in A.D. 29 than in A.D. 2005. The master praised and rewarded them. He told them how happy he was with them. As a reward, it looks as if he let them *keep* all the money...both the principal and the profit!

But the one-talent man hadn't made a single shekel for the boss. This was *not* good...not good at all! — What had he been *thinking?*— He knew what kind of man he worked for, a man who expected to "reap where he hadn't sowed." But that seems to have scared him, so he became unwilling to take chances of any kind. He just dug a hole and buried the money. —Of course, he took a chance that the boss might feel sorry for him and let him off the hook. Maybe he'd get to keep the money. But in that respect, he made a huge mistake. He was left in the end with nothing at all.

O.K. Jesus didn't tell this story to encourage investors to take risks. He wasn't addressing himself to estate managers and high-ranking slaves, offering a kind of first century b-school case study. He had another point, of course, and it was – naturally – a *spiritual* point. It's a point I'd summarize this way: *The Lord is looking for spiritual entrepreneurs.*

Luke records a saying of Jesus that I think is pertinent here. In Luke 12:48 Jesus says, "*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be expected; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.*"

The Lord has entrusted us with the truth of the Gospel. He has endowed us with the gift of faith. These are treasures of incalculable worth. Along with these assets, God has given each of us a range of innate abilities and skills, and on top of those he has blessed us each with spiritual gifts. No two people are exactly alike. Obviously some people are more gifted than others... but there's nobody with *no* gifts at all. And those who might think of themselves as being like the "one-talent man" have to recognize that even the *one* talent man had actually been given a great deal of money to invest. One talent was worth sixteen years' wages. —The reality is that God has been very generous to *all* of us.

The Lord is looking for spiritual entrepreneurs. He has entrusted much *to* us and it's pretty clear that he's expecting a lot *from* us in return. This parable is not about the stewardship of money; it's about our stewardship of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It asks: What are you going to do with your faith? Are you just going to "sit" on it? ...Bury it in a hole in the ground? The Lord is saying to us, to you and me, to Christ Church in Aspen: "I'm looking for *risk-takers*, for adventurers in faith. You've shown that you know how to do that in the business world. So now show me that you can do it in the realm of the spirit, too! —What are you afraid of?"

This parable also tells us that there's ultimately going to be a "day of reckoning." The master returned from his long journey and ordered his three trusted slaves to render an account of what they'd achieved with the wealth he had put into their hands. We're making a colossal blunder – as big as the mistake of the one-talent man in the parable – if we imagine that the Lord is not expecting us to *do* something with the faith and spiritual gifts he has entrusted us. Remember: "*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be expected.*"

What kind of risk in faith are *you* willing to take today? —Maybe we're back with Peter stepping out of the boat in the teeth of storm, trying to walk on water. The principle is not too different. There are as many ways to step out in faith as there are people in the church. But there are some things we all can do. Here's one of them: pray for healing for the sick. We have a healing service here every Wednesday at noon. The average attendance is about six, with more in the summer and fewer now. Last Wednesday there were only three. But we believe in stepping out in faith, and we've heard reports of miracles. — And, no, miracles don't happen every time. Just like investments, some prayers for healing result in a bigger return than others. But we keep investing in faith-filled prayer!

Here's another way to step out in faith: go to your friends and invite them to come to church with you some Sunday. (That's really risky, because you might get labeled as being "religious.") Not every investment will pay off. An insurance man I know said once that this was like making cold calls trying to sell accident insurance. You have to make ten of them in order to get one new customer. But that's o.k. You're doing this in faith —investing what God has given you. And the potential reward is great.

"*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be expected.*" The Lord is looking for spiritual entrepreneurs. —Are you ready to be one?