

REFLECTION it's about trust!

Throughout this year of Matthew we have heard a number of parables about the kingdom of God. In fact, most of the parables about God's kingdom are found in Matthew

How many times did Jesus say, *The kingdom of heaven is like...?*

- the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...
- the kingdom of heaven is like yeast...
- the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field...
- the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls...
- the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner that went out to hire labourers for his vineyard...
- and so on

Last week we heard – *the kingdom of heaven is like 10 bridesmaids...*
And next week we will again visit the parable of the sheep and the goats.

This week we have the parable of the talents.

for it is as if a man going on a journey summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them...

In this parable Jesus is emphasising the accountability of his followers for the gifts entrusted to them.

This story is also found in Luke's gospel although the two accounts are somewhat different - as always the disclaimer that the two gospels were written for very different audiences. In Luke's version (Luke 19:12-27), the master summoned 12 servants and each was given 10 minas. A mina was worth about 100 denarii and a denarius was approximately a day's wage. Only Matthew's version speaks of talents.

In Matthew the three slaves received differing amounts: five, two and one talent. In Luke each received the same amount. In Matthew the two faithful slaves doubled the amount received. In Luke as in Matthew only three slaves reported on the return of the master but the first doubled the amount while the second only realised 50% return on the ten minas. In Luke the rewards were commensurate with the earnings. They were given authority over 10 and five cities. In Matthew the reward was only approval and the invitation to share in the joy of the master.

Estimating the worth of a talent is difficult but is generally reckoned that it would take a worker 15 years of work to earn one talent.

PRECIS OF THE PARABLE

Imagine this parable today!

The kingdom of God is like a man of some wealth who has to take an extended business trip. He calls together three of his trusted workers. He leaves them with the responsibility for managing his business while he is gone.

To the most capable of the three he gives \$5000 as working capital. To the next he gives \$2000. To the third he gives \$1000. As soon as he departs the first two immediately put his capital to work. The third is fearful of his boss. He knows he is a shrewd, hard-nosed entrepreneur. He is fearful that he will lose the \$1000 by bad investment. He does not even trust the banks. So he finds a safe place and hides the money so he will be sure to have it when the boss returns.

Eventually the businessman completes his travels and returns. He calls together his three subordinates and asks them to give an accounting. The first two report that they have doubled the original capital. He commends each of them and assures them of an ongoing partnership with him. The third comes forward in a fawning manner. He says he was mindful of the success of the boss so he played it safe. He hid the money to be sure he would not lose it.

The man is unhappy with the third worker. He scolds him by saying that he should at least have put it in a saving account so it would earn interest. He orders the \$1000 transferred to the account of the worker who now had \$10,000. He comments that those who do well with what they are entrusted will be given greater responsibility. Those who do not even act responsibly with the little they have will have that taken from them.

The businessman proceeds to fire the third man who goes out to join the multitude of homeless and unemployed.

MEANING OF THE PARABLE

To return to Matthew's parable.

This is a story about three servants. And it's a story about a master who goes away. It involves a huge sum of money. If it took a man 15 years to earn one talent, these servants were being offered the equivalent of more than a lifetime's work. The master was entrusting the servants with a fortune.

BUT...

The parable of the talents is not about money.

The parable of the talents is about TRUST.

The story opens with a demonstration of trust. The servants are entrusted with the master's wealth.

When the master returns and calls in the servants, two of them have made investments and doubled the money. the third has made nothing at all. He played it safe. He returns to his master exactly what he received. He hid the money in a hole in the ground. Like people today who hide their money in the mattress.

He didn't lose a cent, but he didn't make any money either, not accounting for inflation!

He explained why he chose to bury the money instead of investing it – he was afraid of the master! He was afraid he would lose the money and be in trouble. He was afraid of his own lack of ability and he was afraid of what the master's reaction would be.

Fear is the opposite of trust.

He was afraid to take a risk, so he could not make a profit.

Do you ever wonder what would have happened if the other two servants had lost money? Would the master have been angry? What if they had come back empty handed? Do you think the master would nevertheless have accepted them? Upon reflection, I think he would have.

In the parable what the master commands is not their profits, but their faithfulness. He doesn't commend the servant who produced 5 talents any more than the one who produced 2. They each received the same commendation.

Well done, good and trustworthy servant.

Each receives the same invitation.

You have been trustworthy in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master

In his response to the third servant, the master makes clear he would have accepted even the little bit of interest he would have got from putting it into a savings account.

The parable is NOT about money or ability. It's about trust. The master trusts his servants. And two of them return the favour by acting out of trust rather than fear. Things worked out well for them.

But not the third servant. The third servant does not trust the master. And he certainly does not love him. He calls the master "harsh" and "angry".

Some people stop short of committing their whole hearts to God because they don't understand how much God loves us. They see God as harsh and angry and you can hardly commit your heart and soul to someone whom you do not trust. The servant makes the mistake of thinking that he knows the master – but he has it all wrong. He ends up being thrown into "outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

That doesn't sound very loving!

What we have to remember about this parable that it is a story.

Remember it starts "It was as if..."

Quite simply, a parable is a story that is told to teach us something.

This is not an historical account. Jesus is telling a story to explain what he expects of his followers. We are to use the gifts we have been given for the work of God's kingdom.

The dire ending is to make Jesus' point.

We have been left in charge of great wealth – it's not ours.

We are to trust that God will care for us.

If we have faith that God is fair and faithful, then we will reach out and share what we have.

In the parable, the servant gets exactly what he was afraid of – he gets rejected and cast out. The point of the story is - God does not value playing safe. Jesus never played it safe. In fact he seemed to be always going out of his way to stir things up.

Rev Judy Kincaid says,

In these days of declining numbers and dwindling offerings, we can be tempted to play it safe. The church can be tempted to play it safe.

Jesus is saying, playing it safe is not acceptable. The church and its resources are not ours. Everything we have has been entrusted to us by the master so we can use it – to spread the good news about Jesus and to alleviate suffering in the world.

We have been entrusted with great blessings. We have been put in charge of the master's wealth and burying it in a hole is not okay. Do we fail to reach out to the community or start new ventures because we are afraid we might fail. The truth is we will fail sometimes and that's okay. The parable of the talents is about risking everything we have for the Lord and trusting that God will love us and care for us, even when we fail.

It's about loving God and trusting our master enough to take some risks.

It's about reaching out in faith to share what we have been given.

It's about trusting that you will have enough and you will be loved even if you fail.

It's about earning the commendation,

well done, good and trustworthy servant; enter into the joy of your Lord

AMEN