

Sermon by Anna Sloss for Sunday, November 19, 2017
Matthew 25: 14-30

Deep Investment

This morning we heard the parable of the talents. Now usually when we talk about talents, we are talking about things that we are good at, but in the context of this parable, a talent is actually a name for a coin. So this parable could also be known as the parable of money.

At first, this parable seems like it could make a good stewardship sermon... The parable of *money*. Where the master generously gives money to the servants, and the two that invested and *returned their gold to the master* with interest, are called good and trustworthy and enter into the joy of the master.

... but also, did you hear about the 3rd servant in the parable?! That's where I got a bit uncomfortable about this whole thing. The 3rd servant buried the money and the master says the worthless servant should be thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

YIKES!! ..What?!?! Violent texts like this always grab my attention. And when we read them out loud in church and get to the part "Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth...The Gospel of the Lord!" What? its more like there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth?! "The Gospel of the Lord?!?"

Last week, Pastor Bouman preached on a parable in Matthew that also had some grave consequences. She stated how a Biblical commentator said that "you know it's a parable when you have this reaction: I don't know what you mean by that but I don't like it"

But here I am, with this parable, trying to make sense of it, and we will get to that part, to the third servant and violent part...but first I want you to just completely forget that part of the story, where the master gets super angry and the third servant is thrown in outer darkness, for burying the money, which was maybe the safe thing to do if the economy was bad, but whatever, so lets just forget that part for a bit. I promise we will get back to it.

So as I said earlier, this text could have led to a stewardship theme, as they are talking about money, **but today I want to look at this parable through the lens of relationship.** I am going to take my parable reading glasses, I imagine mine have like this red hue to them, like the ones that you find in cereal boxes that allow you to read the secret code. You should get yours too.

So the story has the characters, of a master and servants. With my glasses on, lets read in God as the master and humanity as the servants. The master (God) trusts these servants (humanity) with her talents. My glasses also made the master a she. They are really great glasses.

So the master gives each of the servants' talents, money. Now one talent is actually worth 15 years of paychecks. So to one of the servants she gave 75 years of paychecks, so basically all the money someone could earn in their LIFETIME!? (oh here you go) The master gives it to her servant.

The master trusted these servants with A LOT!

The master is a generous master, trusting in the servants with her talents, her resources.

God is a generous God, trusting in humanity with all of God's creation.

Now looking at this parable with the lens of relationship, you get an extra little monocle for your glasses that has an inscription around the outside rim from Matthew 6:21, it reads: "where your treasure is, there your heart is also" So now we have our glasses on, we look at the parable, we have our inscription monocle, and we read, the master entrusted her treasure with these servants. Where your treasure is, there your heart is also. The master entrusted her heart with these servants. Generous God indeed.

We'll set the glasses aside for a second.

So then two of the servants, took the money, and took a risk. They invested their money in a way that their money doubled! And I am no accountant, but apparently to invest in such a way where your money DOUBLES, it is super risky to do, and you could easily lose all of your money. So we are talking BIG risk. They probably invested deeply in a lot of things.

Looking at this in the lens of relationship, with our glasses, and with our monocle, where your treasure is, there your heart is also; these servants invested the *heart* that the master gave them, deeply in a lot of things. Investing a heart, entering into relationships. That *is* risky business. They took risks in their heart being broken, risking rejection, risking humiliation. Relationships are ARE risky, and these things can happen.

But relationships also can give back double of what you give. They can support you in your time of need, they can provide opportunities for growth and change. They can bring you joy, hope, and love.

Now the master being God, gives her heart to us, for us to invest deeply in others.

What does it look like for you, having been given God's heart to invest deeply in others. How does that take place in your life?
Is it by sitting with a person who normally sits alone at lunch?
Is it by having a serious conversation with someone whose racist or sexist remarks are not acceptable?
Is it by visiting someone at the hospital?
Reaching out to someone you know is grieving?
Standing up for just treatment of the marginalized?

Sometimes we are brave, we speak up and reach out, we take these risks to be a more caring and just society. And sometimes... sometimes we fall short. We stay silent. We stay in our comfort zones, and we ignore those around us, and we keep to ourselves.

Sometimes we are like the 3rd servant. We are fearful. We play it safe. And we bury our treasure in the ground. We bury our heart in the ground.

The 3rd servant, after the master gave him her heart, buries it into the ground, and the 3rd servant speaks first after this act to the master saying, "I knew you were a harsh woman"

But then this harshness DOES come true?! The master does do harsh things. (We are at the part that I told you to forget in the beginning, but we are coming back to it now.) The part where the master spouts off "you worthless servant, throw him in the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Yikes. The poor 3rd servant... where is the grace?

While I think we can read God as the master into the beginning of the parable, I think it is dangerous to do so in the end. So what is this ending all about?

Does the 3rd servant predict this upon himself, he said to the master "I knew you were a harsh woman"before the master even was harsh. Did the 3rd servant choose outer darkness for himself? If this is how the third servant sees God, I think the third servant needs a new pair of glasses.

Because fear and violence is not the way that God works.

As it said in a reading we heard this morning, 1 Thessalonians verse 9 "for God has destined us, not for wrath."

In our relationship glasses, we have a fuller picture of God. We can read in a larger story. We know that God is a God of love and a God of relationship, A God who comes, in the flesh, to be with us, who goes to the cross, where there is weeping, and gnashing of nails in feet and hands

and where there is resurrection, that even death cannot separate us from God and our relationship with God.

This is grace, this is good news for the 3rd servant, this is the Gospel of the Lord.

Violence at the end of our parable today is not our ending. Just as the violence of the cross was not the ending of that important story. We have resurrection that proclaims that nothing, not even death, will separate us from the love of God. God lets NOTHING get in the way of relationship with us, even when we bury our hearts.

Today we give thanks for the grace of God, for the fuller story we have in our relationship glasses, for the generous God, who trusts us with all of her creation and her heart.

With these gifts she has given us, we respond with our whole selves investing our hearts deeply. Taking risks to build relationships that change us, to speak up in caring and just ways.

And when we bury our heart in the ground, we have a God who comes in the flesh, Jesus, who has scars in his hands and dirt under his fingernails, ready to dig it out and meet us where we are.

Amen