

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

SOMETHING BURIED

Matthew 25:14-30

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

14 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where

you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

DIAGNOSIS: Risk Averse

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Failure to Act*

Jesus told this parable in response to the disciples' question about the sign of his coming and the end of the age (24:3). He paints a picture of what the kingdom of heaven will be like at that time. Within that picture is a slave whose behavior resembles us, all these centuries later. The third slave described in the story received money from his master but he buried it in the ground (v. 25). Now he is waiting for his master to return and he is paralyzed. He failed to act with what was given to him and he will have to face the consequences. What about us? We are modern-day slaves to the stock market, to the housing market, to the job market. We watch the daily ups and downs of Wall Street with furrowed brows. We hold onto houses that are too big and too expensive because we're buried in mortgage debt. We put off retirement because we don't know what is going to happen. We are paralyzed. We cannot act. There is no joy in this hole we've dug for ourselves.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Buried by Fear*

The slave in the parable admits that fear of his master is the driving force behind his failure to act (v. 25). He was anxious about what would happen to the one talent and how the harsh man (v. 24) would respond. He came up with what he thought was the safest solution: he hid it. The slave hopes that by simply returning the talent as it was given to him, dusting it off and handing it over to the master with, "Here you have what is yours" (v. 25), the whole thing will be over. His fear makes his heart and mind strive for self-preservation above all else. He trusts in that hole he dug in the ground to protect the money and to maintain his own place in the master's household.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Thrown Out*

The master returns to settle accounts, and he is not pleased with the third slave. Unlike the other two slaves, he has nothing to show for the money he hid in the ground. The master takes his one talent and gives it to the first slave who acted boldly with his five talents (v. 28). The master takes the fearful slave's life and orders it to be thrown into the outer darkness (v. 30). The slave who acted out of a desire to protect himself turns out to be the one the master calls "wicked and lazy" (v. 26). In our time, we might not be hiding suitcases of dollar bills in the backyard, but it's likely that we're buried under stock market reports, housing values, and credit card receipts. We fear their power more than we fear, love, and trust the God who gives us everything we have. So it should come as no surprise that when the Son of Man comes in his glory (24:31), we will find him harsh. We will find ourselves in that same outer darkness, called by the same name, "worthless slave," with the same weeping and gnashing of teeth.

PROGNOSIS: Risking it All

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Worthy*

The only One in this world who truly did have everything, even divinity itself, willingly let it all be taken away when he went to the cross. Jesus died for the sake of wicked and lazy slaves from all times and places. He was buried for us, but unlike that one talent that sat underground doing nothing, Jesus' burial led to great returns. He took on our sin and worthlessness and gave us our worth as beloved and redeemed children of God. God's love and grace transform slaves who are paralyzed by fear of the future into bold disciples who joyfully anticipate the coming of the kingdom.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Emboldened*

In the heart of the slave who is made worthy by Christ's death and resurrection, faith in Jesus replaces fear. Instead of worrying about a harsh master, we can follow a generous and forgiving Lord. Safety and self-preservation no longer guide our behavior. Neither the hole we so carefully dug in the ground, nor the money we hid there, can capture our attention any more. Knowing that Jesus gave up his life to give us abundant life, we have nothing to fear, and nothing to hide.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Living for the Kingdom*

Now we see with trusting hearts and clear eyes the great abundance of love, forgiveness, and peace that God has poured out on us. Knowing that there is no limit to God's grace, we can take great risks, share with others the abundance we've received, and watch the Holy Spirit multiply it even further. We can proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ will come again. While we wait with joy for the coming of God's kingdom, we can invite others to throw off their fear. We can challenge them and ourselves to live out our faith and follow the One who makes us worthy. Together, we can serve our neighbors in ways that give ourselves away, offer glimpses of the kingdom, and prepare us to enter into the joy of our master (vv. 21 & 23) when he comes

again.