

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

“HAVING THE TALENT”

Matthew 25:14-30

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

14'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20Then 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." 21His 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." 22And 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." 23His 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." 24Then 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; 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” 26But 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? 27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29For 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. 30As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

DIAGNOSIS: Hidden Talents

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Mishandled Gifts*

Helmut Thielicke shared a story about a student to whom he had said, “You are very gifted.” The student blushed; but Thielicke added, “I said you were gifted; that means you were given a gift.” Every one of our gifts and talents are from the Giver’s Hand, “entrusted property.” We have the talent(s) and they are ours, to be sure. But they are ours to use for good. And too often we think of them only as our own. That is a misappropriation of gifts, often showing up in our very reluctance to “invest” them for the good of all, Creator and creation alike. When people are neglected by our failure to do what we can with the talent(s) with which we are entrusted, we abuse both the Creator and his creatures. When we see the Creator’s world as our own to do with as we please, we are abusing both the Creator and the creation. “Wicked and lazy” are the adjectives Jesus uses in the gospel to describe this

behavior. And we haven't heard the end of it.

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Misplaced Trust*

How much we misrepresent the Giver, and the talent(s) we have, becomes evident when accounts are to be given. The "wicked and lazy" slave recounts that he thought of his Master as "a harsh man," one of whom he was "afraid." There may now be reasons for that fear, but the real problem is not these perceptions of the Master, but the misplaced trust all along in the heart of the gifted. For while we are more than ready to lay claim to the talents we have been given, we refuse to own our failure when accountability comes to make its claim.

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Outer Darkness*

There is a place, however, for those who so misplace this trust and responsibility: outer darkness. As the gifts were placed in deep, dark holes and left to go stale, so are those who fail to use them for the good. There is only the nothingness that comes with the investment of nothing. This deep hole of darkness ought not to be spiritualized into some distant future. It is a place of meaninglessness that God makes even here and now, even as there is the struggle to find peace and rest, only weeping and gnashing of teeth.

PROGNOSIS: Trading Talents

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Christ's Journey into the Darkness*

Where we find Light in the darkness comes from the "Man going on a journey" (v. 14). Christ journeys into the depths of our darkness of separation from God, despite what we deserve as ingrates and abusers of the good God's gifts. The journey into the darkness culminates on the cross. The cross restores, redeems meaning for life and for the world. Light shines into all corners of the darkness in this One's journey for us, and

finally and fully, the Master is seen for Who he is: for us and for our salvation.

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Reclaimed Boldness*

Those who see the Master in this Light are newly emboldened to “go off at once” (v. 16) to use the talents to produce more for the kingdom. This is the hope that moves beyond all our fears and failures, which journeys with our Lord for the sake of doing the Lord’s bidding, re-doubling our efforts in faith. Because our Lord finds us in the dark, we are able to see through the darkness and live by a faith that is willing to risk the investment.

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Doing Well and Good*

In the busy efforts to use the gifts we have been given for good, we have very little time for hiding-no time to bury the talents-but look instead for ways to “make” (vv. 16 and 17) the kingdom, creating anew. (Bob Bertram used to speak of ways to “parlay” something problematic into something promising.) We are out there by faith, sometimes on a limb, but never alone. For by faith, we trust our Lord is there with his good pleasure in the gifts we come bearing. The fruits of these labors done in faith are claimed by Jesus’ new adjectives, “well done, good and trustworthy.” But that claim is not about the labors, but the laborers. We, ourselves, are esteemed by this Lord for daring to live through the darkness, trusting his Word of Promise, risking the gifts and talents in faith. And through it all, Jesus the Christ is the real Talent on Whom we’ve been banking our hopes, and Whom we now have.