

Sermon: *The Five Talents*  
The Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 11.19.23

By a show of hands, how many of you have heard a sermon about the five talents? Most of you, I see. I too have preached on it; but, today is different. We have a baptism. Three baptisms, actually. We have seventeen-year old Landon and his two parents, Archena and Scott, all three are getting baptized today. It is very exciting and quite an honor for me to participate in this life-changing event.

What in the world does the parable of the five talents have to do with baptism? I've been wondering this all week. When I don't have a clear path to go on, I will read the Gospel passage in Greek. Why Greek, you might ask? It was the original language in which Matthew wrote his Gospel. It's a durable and long-standing language and widely used in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in the Mediterranean. Thankfully, it translates well into English; except for one thing. There is a verb tense in Greek that is not found in English. Called the aorist tense, it means an action that happened in the past, is still happening today and will happen in the future. Quite simply put: as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. It takes English three phrases to say what this tense says in Greek. I am bringing this up because today's parable is full of aorist tenses.

Here's the text: The Kingdom is like a man going on a journey summons his servants; to one he gives five talents, another two and yet another one talent. Here is a direct translation: *to one servant he gave, is giving, and will give five talents...* and so on. Even "the man going on a journey" is "a man who has gone, is going, will go on a journey." What I get from this is that it is a procession, a process, an evolution. Something happened in the past – the man gave away some talents – but also is giving talents and will give. Hold onto that thought for a moment.

One criticism of this parable is that we tend to focus on the man with one talent and think that is unfair. However, if you look at the tense, you will see it is something that happened in the past, which is happening now and will happen. It's a progression. And, as the parable points out, the one with five talents invested it in the market place and it doubled, is doubling, will double. Yet, another aorist tense there. Likewise, the servant with the two talents invested it, is investing and will invest. The servant with one talent buried it. Period.

If you are wondering what a "talent" is; and yes, it's easy to think of somebody with lots of talents – like singing, acting and dancing. Those are talents for sure; but, in the Gospel, the word talent basically means fifteen years wages. If you imagine that someone apprentices at the age of 15 and then works for 15 years and then, let's say the average age of death back then was 30, a talent would be an entire lifetime's salary of work. "To one he gave/is giving/will give 5." That's five lifetimes of employment. That's a lot. "To another he gave 2." Still, a lot. And to yet another, he gave one. That is a descent and respectable life – one's lifetime of employment. The bigger question: what did they do with it?

I'd like to think of "investing" of the talents is taking a risk. I heard a song the other day sung by Cher. She was doing a cover of an old Motown hit. And boy oh boy did she sing it. If I didn't know better, it sounded fresh and new like it was her own. That Cher can sing. She can also act. One of the favorite movies of all time for Christi to watch with me is Moonstruck. Have you seen it? It's a good holiday movie, by the way. She won an academy award for her acting performance. She can sing and she can act. And model too. And plus, other things I don't know about. First and foremost, however, Cher is a risk taker. It takes a big risk to sing. How about to sing a Motown classic? How about to act? How many times did she get turned down for a role because she's a singer? It takes risk-taking and tenacity. Cher was talented, is talented, will be talented... and a risk taker.

The servant with the five talents is a risk taker. He believed in himself, in taking risks and most likely he had tenacity. Likewise, the one with two talents – also a risk taker. The one who buried the one talent? Not a risk taker or tenacious.

In the parable, Jesus said the man-who-gave-the-talents said, "Why didn't you just invest the one talent with the bank and received interest on it?" Even that took too much risk-taking or faith or tenacity. Jesus then uses some of the harshest words you will hear in the Gospel – that servant was sent out to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The first two congregations I served as Rector were places that had been broken and needed to be rehabilitated. Thankfully not here – in fact, I think All Angels is my "Well done good and faithful servant" moment; you all are the reward from heaven. In order to serve broken congregations, I studied other priests and pastors who did it. One of them, an Episcopal priest, told me that on his first Sunday at a broken parish that the diocese decided need to stay open, he was sent in and, at the right time said, "The Peace of the Lord be always with you." They responded, "And also with you." And then stood there looking straight ahead. They didn't share any peace at all with the people around them. The next Sunday, the same 30 people or so were in the congregation, the priest said, "The Peace of the Lord be always with you." And they responded correctly but did no movement. He said, "Please share the sign of peace with your neighbors." And they didn't. They just stared straight ahead. The priest stopped the service and told everyone to sit down. He dragged a chair in from the parish hall and sat with them. He said, "Look folks, if you can't share the peace with one another; a handshake, an acknowledgment of one another; there is no way you are going to invite your friends or neighbors here; there is no way you are going to welcome the stranger; there is no way this church will ever grow. Right now, this church is as good as dead." Three years later, that church is growing; it's one of the most outgoing and friendly churches in the diocese, and they have one of the best outreach programs going. They didn't bury their talents; they took some risks. The diocese saw the amount of talents in that congregation and sent him – the priest – in. But, all the talents in the world won't matter if they get buried. They have to get used.

My new clergy friend, the Rev. Dr. Julia Piermont, the new senior pastor at Christ Church Presbyterian, Longboat Key; she and her husband Dennis visited All Angels last Sunday. She

told me then, later she wrote an email, and then on the phone a couple of days ago, Julia told me at what an outstanding and welcoming and warm congregation I serve. She said I'm lucky; which I completely agree. One of the many talents of All Angels is being a friendly, warm, open and inviting congregation. It's one of the gifts and talents that we share. And, to be frank, our talents here have, and are, and will be changing this island community. Longboat Key is a special place. Why, because there is a congregation that is willing to take risks and use their talents and share themselves with others.

As a part of our baptismal service, I'm about to ask you all to renew your commitment to Christ. I'm going to ask you some questions that have some great verbs: will you **continue** in the apostles teaching and fellowship and the **breaking** of bread and in the **prayers**. Will you **persevere** in resisting evil. Will you **proclaim by word and example** the good news of God in Christ. Another way to ask that is this: will you share, will you welcome, will you smile, will you do the good news that you have within you? Will you share that joy inside of you with someone else? Both by word and, I think more importantly nowadays, by example. The next one: will you **seek and serve Christ** in all persons **loving** your neighbor as yourself. And then the last one: will you **strive for justice and peace** among all people and will you **respect** the dignity of every human being?

These are the talents that God has given his Church. This is the life work of the church. If the church were someday to retire and look back on her vocation these are it: continuing the apostles teaching; persevering and resisting evil; proclaiming by word and example the good news of God; and seeking and serving Christ in all persons; and loving our neighbors as ourselves; and striving for justice and striving for peace among all people and respecting the dignity of every human being. These are The Talents – the entire life-work – of the Church.

If you feel as if you've been given one talent, that might be the first question: *will you continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship?* Yes. That's the first talent. Don't bury it. Take a risk, use it to continue in the breaking of bread and in the prayers.

If you identify with the one who has received the five talents – God expects an accounting of all that God has given. It takes risks to respect the dignity of every human being. It takes risks and tenacity to love your neighbor as yourself. It takes tremendous risks to strive for justice and peace among all people. But if not us, who? These are the Talents of the Church. And, we don't do them alone. Each time we say "Yes" we are also saying "With God's help." God, the risk taker; the one who has tenacity; who never sleeps, never gives up, always loves and hopes and seeks us out. The man may have gone on a journey away from his servants; our God, Jesus himself with the power of the Holy Spirit, will never leave us to go on a journey somewhere else. The talents that God gives; when we are risk takers, we do so with God's help.

By taking risks, by doing these things, may we all hear the words at the end of the parable: *Well done good and faithful servant welcome into my joy and Kingdom.*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.