

**Proper 28 - Year A
Matthew 25:14-30
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St. Michael Lutheran Church
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I heard it suggested this week

- that the servant in the parable of the talents
 - who was given the single talent to manage
 - decided to bury it in the ground
 - because he was spooked
 - by the crazy swings in the stock market.

- Now obviously - -

- stock markets,
 - 24 hour cable business channels
 - and 401Ks weren't around in the time of Jesus - -
- and even though it is true - -
 - that Jesus is talking about a significant amount of money that
 - these servants were entrusted with - -
 - at least hundreds of thousands of dollars - -
- I don't think Jesus was trying to give us
 - investing advice
 - in this parable -
 - at least not the type of investing advice
 - one usually receives.

- No, I think Jesus is inviting us

- to take a look at how we care for and use

- how we invest -

- the gifts and talents with which God blesses us.

- I think Jesus is inviting us to be good stewards,

- good caretakers -

- of our gifts and talents.

- I think Jesus is inviting us

- to put our gifts and talents

- to use to strengthen God's ministry in the world.

- And I think - -

- that most, if not all of us,

- want to do

- exactly what Jesus is inviting us to do.

- We want to use our gifts wisely.

- We want to make a difference.

- We want to use our talents to expand God's ministry in the world.

- But wanting to do something, - -

- and doing it aren't always the same thing.

- I wonder if we,

- like that third servant,

- don't find ourselves intentionally and unintentionally

- burying our talents

- out of fear or uncertainly.

- Fear - - that what we have to give might not be needed.

- Fear - - that what we have to give might not be accepted.

- Fear - - that we might not be capable of doing what is needed.

- Or perhaps it is

- Uncertainty about what our gifts are.

- Uncertainty about whether our gifts are useful.

- Uncertainty about how to put our gifts to use.

- So this morning,

- I invite you to bury any fears and uncertainties you may have about your gifts

- and instead

- begin to invest your gifts and talents

- in God's ministry for the world by

- Claiming the gifts God has given you.

- by Discovering what you are passionate about.

- by Connecting your gifts and passions.

- and by Taking action.

Claim.

Discover.

- Connect

- Act.

- Four simple steps

- to help you make the most of the gifts God has given you.

- The first step is Claim the gifts God has given you.
 - For many people, this one is the hardest step.
 - I can't tell you how many people I have talked to over the years
 - who have said "Pastor, I don't really have anything to offer."
 - and my response is always,
 - "Of course you do,
 - God blesses all of us."

- What is it Paul says to the Corinthians (*12:4-7*)
 - There are a variety of gifts, but the same spirit - -
 - to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
 - You and I and all of God's people are gifted by God.
 - You and I and all of God's people have been given talents and abilities.
 - You and I and all of God's people are important
 - and what we have to offer matters.

The key is to claim what God has already given you.

- It might be the ability to sing.
 - It might be vast resources of wealth.
 - It might be open blocks of time in your day.
- Take a look at your life - -
 - either through a time of self reflection
 - or a conversation with a trusted friend
 - or through one of the many gift identification tools
 - I can share with you. - -

- Claim the one or two

- best gifts and talents God has given you.

- Write them down so you don't forget.

- Once you have claimed those gifts,

- Discover what you are passionate about - -

- What you get excited out - -

- What one thing you would chose to do first given the chance.

- It might be helping children.

- It might be painting.

- It might be playing games.

- You don't have to be excellent in this area.

- We are simply talking about something that you dearly love, -

- something that gets you excited.

- Pick the one or two things that you are most passionate about,

- and then with prayer and reflection,

- either by yourself or with a trusted friend,

- start to look for ways to connect your gifts and your passions

- so you can take action.

- So for example, - -

- I have a passion for helping ministries.

- I have a passion for feeding ministries.

- I am blessed to be the pastor of a congregation

- that has a heart for feeding ministries and helping ministries.

- I discovered the idea of Backpack Feeding programs that help hungry kids.
 - I discovered the reality
 - that we have hungry kids in our community.
- When I connected my passions,
 - the congregation's passions,
 - an excellent idea,
 - and other passionate people,
 - then Micah's Backpack was born, - -
 - and this new helping ministry
 - is now on its second week of delivering food to five young people
 - in the community.
- Now connecting your gifts and passions and taking action,
 - doesn't mean you have to start a new ministry. - -
 - It certainly could mean you find two or three other passionate people
 - and start a new ministry together with God's help,-
 - but more likely connects gifts and passions means you plug in
 - and strengthen an existing ministry
 - in the congregation or the community.
 - Or you make a personal connection
 - that allows you to be God's hands and feet in the world to another.
 - Or you decide to share your resources
 - an in so doing,
 - you enable other ministries to happen.

- And while it is true,
 - that only you can know
 - the gifts and talents with which God has blessed you,
 - it is equally true that
 - when we claim our gifts and talents,
 - when we connect those gifts and talents
 - to the things we are passionate about,
 - and when we act to use those gifts
 - in ministry in the world,
 - then with God's help,
 - our gifts,
 - your gifts can and do make a difference in the world.