

“This Is a Day of New Beginnings, Time to Believe What Love Is Bringing”

Fourth in a Four-Week Sermon Series

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Lent, Sunday, March 17, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 43: 16-21 Matthew 25: 14-30

Isaiah 43: 16-21

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord,

who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,

¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior;

they lie down, they cannot rise,

they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

¹⁸ Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;

now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

²⁰ The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches;

for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,

to give drink to my chosen people,

²¹ the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

Matthew 25: 14-30

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.'

Sermon

*"This is a day of new beginnings,
Time to remember and move on,
Time to believe what love is bringing,
Laying to rest the pain that's gone."*

Lyrics written by Brian Wren;

music created by Carlton Young;

unlimited love and gifts of the spirit supplied by Jesus Christ.

5, 2, 1

521 could be the number of spam emails filling up your in-box.

Or 521 could stand for the number of homeruns hit by baseball legends

Ted Williams, Willie McCovey and Frank Thomas.

Or 5-21 could be May 21, the beautiful spring day last year

when the world was supposed to end and the rapture to start,

or maybe it really did!

...except that no one we know got “raptured”

and here we are, still praying, still serving,
still playing,

still working on what it means

to be getting ready for
the Kingdom of God.

5, 2, 1

Jesus Christ talked about 5, and 2, and 1.

He was speaking with his followers,

those close by and those overhearing the Gospel from a slight
distance,

good folks listening just the same as the disciples,

when Jesus told them a curious parable.

Clarence Jordan said that a parable is like a box of spiritual TNT

that Jesus puts in your hands

and when we finally think, "*Oh, I get it!*"

Christ is already gone on down the road and over
the hill,

listening as it goes off, boom!

A parable is a clear, concise story

with vivid images and characters that we can understand,

one with a message so cleverly hidden

that only you can grasp it's meaning for your life.

The magic and mystery of a parable is it appears generic yet it is deeply
personal.

No one else can tell you what a parable means to you.

But you'll know.

You will get it. *Bam!*

The Word will hit you between the eyes,

shake you, wake you, re-create you and break you

from a wayward past for a future that
lasts.

Today's Word comes to us from a specific time in Jesus' life on earth

and it speaks to the specificity of our own situations and experiences.

In Matthew 25

we encounter Jesus in the last full week of his life on earth
before the crucifixion and resurrection.

The disciples press him for information and guidance
about the timing of God's full reign.

The disciples give voice to our inner thoughts and questions.

If only...

If only we could learn when God will reign on earth, we could be better prepared.

If only we knew what to do, we'd understand God's expectations for us,
then we could be more faithful,

more confident,

more self-assured that we are on
the right track.

If only...

Jesus hears and responds.

In response to their questioning minds and wondering souls,

Jesus tells stories, parables, fictional accounts and imaginings

that speak to the relationship between God and God's
people.

Jesus says that the Kingdom of Heaven

is like a demanding, intentional master

who must go away for a period of time.

The amount of time is not mentioned,

but the expectation is that those left behind

will be faithful and responsible while the master is away.

The master distributes talents before leaving.

To one the master gives 5 talents;

to one the master distributes 2 talents;

to another the master gives 1 talent.

5, 2, 1

Jesus says that talents are given by the master to each according to ability.

Then the master departs.

The one who was given 5 talents puts those to work, and soon has 5 more.

The one who was given 2 talents puts those to work, and soon has 2 more.

When the master returns he is visibly pleased with their doubling of the investments,

and rewards both servants with more talents.

²¹ *[The] master said to [them],*

'Well done, good and trustworthy slave[s];

you have been trustworthy in a few things,

I will put you in charge of many things;

enter into the joy of your master.'

However, the third, who was given 1 talent,

buried his talent in order to keep it safe from thieves, or so he says,

and is only able to return the original talent.

This displeases the master.

As Jesus tells the story, he says:

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.'

Bam! Ouch!

Have you ever seen disappointment expressed as anger?

The servant given 1 talent did nothing wrong...except hoarding.

No commitment was broken; no blood was spilled nor relationships damaged.

Is hoarding what we have been given so bad?

Yet the master is so upset, so disappointed, so frustrated

that the servant is cast away.

This passage does damage to our feeble attempts to put God in a box,

to paint the holy with one swipe of the brush.

This parable redefines and reexamines our grasp of sin and evil.

According to the master

who gave away a talent

and then expected it to be used and celebrated and

shared,

to hoard and hide a gift is a sin,

to just get by when you have so much to give

is an intentional act

that separates one from one's full potential.

It is a crime, a low down, dirty shame

to hide your light under a bushel,

to seek to just get by,

to be lazy or slothful or a disappointment

when you have so much beauty and
power,

so much God-given glory and
talent!

Just one talent

If only...just one talent.

Jesus says that talents are given to each according to his ability.

It is the Living Christ who gives us our gifts.

It is the Master that distributes gifts.

We like to think that we are the creators and earners of our gifts,

or that we can bestow talent upon one another,

or somehow win it or buy it or earn it.

One day a king stood on a parapet of his castle

and addressed his people standing in the courtyard below.

“It is my desire that everyone in our fair land receive an education.

Therefore I am bestowing on all of you a Bachelor of Arts degree.”

It is the Master who distributes talents.

It is the Christ who gives, who loves, who saves, who redeems and reconciles,

and it is the Christ whose will for the building up of the Kingdom

is so encompassing and pervasive

that Christ gives you talent

for doing God’s work and will while the Master is away.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

“Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

Therefore it is said,

*“When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people.”*

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets,

some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

to equip the saints for the work of ministry,

*for building up the body of Christ,
until all of us come to the unity of the faith
and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
to maturity, to the measure of the full
stature of Christ.”*

Every December during Advent our congregation offers to the city

an original Christmas Pageant to the glory of God.

A couple years ago our story focused on the Three Kings.

We called it *“Three Wise Men...Are You Serious?”*

You may have heard the biblical story of the gifts of the Wise Men,

the way they visited Bethlehem and gave the baby Jesus

gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

Our pageant explored the question, “Did baby Jesus give them gifts in return?”

What about the gifts of a star in the East to guide them,

the gift of a dream to live into,

the gift of courage for the journey,

fortitude in friendship,

and commitment to stand up to the principalities and powers?

What about the gifts to go home by another way,

the gifts to tell their story,

and the gifts to proclaim the goodness of God?

If only we would let our light so shine,
the brightness would bedazzle the world.

Currently our congregation is daring to go through the process
of envisioning new beginnings and a new future story,
so we are exploring what are our resources and gifts, assets and
talents.

What gifts do we have that ought not be hoarded?

What gifts can we draw on and then set loose and utilize in new ways for a
new day?

"This is a day of new beginnings,

Time to remember and move on,

Time to believe what love is bringing,

Laying to rest the pain that's gone."

We are anticipating what love is bringing,
the master has left us with talents and resources and gifts,

the master will return one day

and will call us front and center to explain ourselves,

and we can so easily give way

to the temptation to hoard our gifts and resources

and then say... *"Lord, we had just 1 talent."*

Just one talent.

Just? Just one talent?

Do you ever feel as if your gifts don't matter?

Do you belittle what you have, what you have been given by the grace of God?

One day an All Star baseball player on the NY Mets dropped a fly ball in right field.

After the game he asked a coach to meet him early the next day for fielding practice.

The coach hit fly ball after fly ball to right field, and the ballplayer caught them all.

Afterward the coach said, *"So, what time do you want to practice tomorrow?"*

The All Star answered, *"No thanks, coach. I'm fine; I don't need to practice again."*

This is a true story of a person who was occasionally better than average

yet it was a tragedy that he had the potential to be great, and never was.

The Baseball Gods gave him a gift, and he squandered it.

Staying with the sports scene,

when we make a list of the greatest athletes we may mention

Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, Tony Gwinn and Wayne

Gretsky.

Do you know what they all had in common besides talent?

They practiced.

Fact: Jordan and Bird took more practice shots than anyone else;

Tony Gwinn and “the Great One” Gretsky

hit more baseballs and hockey pucks, respectively, than their teammates.

5 talents? 2 talents? 1 talent?

Let’s face it: it doesn’t matter what we start with.

One fine day the Master will return – yes, the Master will return –

and will want to know and see and hear and witness what you and I are doing

with what we have been given by Christ for the glory of God.

Are you ready for show and tell?

Just one talent?

We need to bury the word just.

Let’s have a funeral.

Let’s go out into the woods and dig a hole six feet down and plant the word just.

And while we’re at it let’s toss in for good measure the attitude can’t.

And behind that dump in the word try.

Don't try. Either you do or you don't.

(Yes, I know I sound like Yoda,

but hey, even a broken clock is right twice a day,)

Oh, and let's lay by the side of just, can't, and try the word fail.

Very popular word today, to call someone a failure, to say their act is a "fail".

Fail is all over YouTube and the social network and a common vernacular.

I have heard Christian people call each other a fail inside this church and in homes.

But that doesn't make it right or good or helpful.

My friends, fear of failure and fear of falling and even fear of our excellence and success

keeps those with 5 talents or 2 talents or 1 talent

from living into their full potential.

And the wasting of potential is a sin; it's evil; it is sad.

You may have heard the story of the reporter

who was retracing the steps of Mark Twain.

He went to Hannibal, Missouri.

A man sitting in the gutter overheard the reporter's quest.

The man said, *"I knew Mark Twain. He was Samuel Clemens back then.*

There' no difference between him and me.

Me and Sam knew all the same stories and folks.

Except that he wrote them down."

Just one talent?

Recently I met a professional in the community who said, *"I'm just a social worker."*

I said, *"No, you are not just a social worker. You are a social worker."*

She asked, *"What time are your services?"*

People want, need, crave to be encouraged and recognized and respected.

People need to be reminded it isn't "just 5 or 2 or 1 talent."

It is *"WOW! You have a talent! Now, how are you and I together*

going to help build the kingdom of God with this?"

Tim, a friend in Tennessee who is about 5' 7", 125 pounds soaking wet, shared how he got arrested for growing marijuana in his backyard.

He was convicted and sentenced to serve his time in a federal prison.

When he arrived at the prison he was surrounded by some very tough individuals,

who asked him who he was with.

Tim said, "I'm a Disciple," meaning, of course, the Disciples of Christ.

However, they thought he meant the Chicago gang called Stone Disciples.

He was so glad to be connected with the holy because no one ever messed with him!

While there he had plenty of time to think and dream and reevaluate
how he was going to use the gifts God have given to him.
Was he going to hoard them? Waste them? Bury them?
Could he and God together set them loose,
liberated and free to transform and transcend?
He had come to the point in his life and faith walk to decide
whether to make whatever sacrifices necessary
to use his talents at his disposal to make a world of difference.

Tim liked to meditate on talents and sacrifices.
He told me about a local farmer in his Tennessee county
who chased his pig and chicken around the barnyard
because the farmer had a hankering for a ham and eggs breakfast.
Tim said that the chicken ran fast but the pig ran faster.
The chicken knew she only had to make a contribution
while the pig had to make a sacrifice.

Each Sunday when Tim took Holy Communion
he would hold the Bread and Cup in his hands
and offer a silent prayer of thanksgiving
for the sacrifice Jesus made for our souls
so that we might make a world of difference.

Whether meditating in a prison cell
or working hard to make an honest living
or serving someone as Christ first served him,
Tim had his eyes on the prize;
he could see a new day coming in the here and now.

He wasn't about to blow his new lease on life.

*"This is a day of new beginnings,
Time to remember and move on,
Time to believe what love is bringing,
Laying to rest the pain that's gone."*

My friends, Love has come into our lives and into the Church's life

and blessed us all with amazing gifts and resources at our disposal.

The Master has given some of us 5 talents, or 2 talents, or 1 talent.

Regardless of the quantity,

what is the quality of our sacrifice?

Thanks be to the sacrifice of Christ, we have a new lease on life.

Now, how are we going to work and play together to help build the kingdom of God?

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!