

Proper 28 A  
November 13, 2011  
Family of Christ Lutheran Church, Chanhassen, Minnesota  
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**1 Thess. 5:1-11; Matthew 5:14-39**

This parable in Matthew's gospel about a billionaire master and his three talented staff members reads like a case study from a textbook on finance. It's about money, you betcha. No two ways about it. The parable is about risk-taking and responsibility, venture capital and investment. AND it's about much more than that.

When we read this story, we have a tendency to focus on what each of the slaves in the story did with the assets he was given – how creative and hardworking and courageous he was or wasn't, how much or how little he multiplied the original investment...



We can admire the industrious slaves who work the talents entrusted to them and succeed in multiplying them. This is America, after all, and this parable makes us feel good about capitalism.

Jesus knows his audience. He has a knack for getting our attention, looking each of us in the eye, and speaking right to our hearts.

You business people sitting out there:  
You understand asset management  
and appreciate the value of making strategic investments.  
You like to see your congregation make wise investments  
of financial resources to secure the future...don't you?

People who work in the service sector understand social capital.  
You see the potential in tapping the diversity of gifts  
present in a community like a congregation,  
to build on those strengths and improve life for all...Right?

Educators and ministers are continually asked to do more with less,  
so we are interested in inspiring generosity and empowering creativity,  
finding inventive solutions to nagging problems.  
Teachers, administrators, church staff – are you with me?

Parents, grandparents, and other adults –  
we know that the youngsters we care about are sponges  
soaking up the values played out around them.  
Sound investment for *us* means teaching the next generation  
to live with integrity,  
with purpose and meaning,  
embodying the good, the just, and the beautiful.

It's not hard for church folks to see the connection  
between Jesus' parable about investment,  
and the decisions we make about the financial resources entrusted to  
us...  
especially the decisions that impact the congregation we depend on for  
our spiritual nurture, Christian friendships, and service opportunities.

But there is another layer here, another story.

The story beneath the story in the Parable of the Talents

is the one about the Giver...  
and the size and scope of the Gift.

Jesus' original listeners would have been on to it right away.  
They realized that he was using hyperbole –  
holy exaggeration -- to say something important about God.  
“Say a super-rich master gave one servant a lump sum equal to 100  
years of his salary,  
another 40 years,  
and another 20 years-worth of wages...  
as gifts, now, no strings attached.  
What does that tell you about what the Lord God is like?”

We'd need a boatload of superlatives  
to describe a God that big, that generous.

Jesus knew what image would get our attention:  
That is why over and over he used money as a symbol  
for what is potent in God's kingdom.

Today he speaks to *us*  
the individuals and families who make up this congregation --  
who have had our moments sitting in the outer darkness  
of an up-and-down economy,  
weeping and gnashing our teeth.

**Jesus is inviting us not to be afraid,  
but to invest in God's life,  
because God's life is powerful...like money, only better.**



And God's grace – the love which fills our cups to overflowing – is intended for all and is sufficient for all

Jesus challenges us not to sit on the gift of God's love, but to spend it.

To do that, we'll have to stop putting grace under the mattress, or burying our faith out in the backyard.

To be the disciples God calls us to be, to live the abundant life God intends for us, we've got to take risks.

Here in this allegorical parable of the kingdom, God is compared to an entrepreneurial multi-billionaire.

God's venture capital is grace; it is God's love – rather than our own talents – that makes us rich.<sup>1</sup>

It's a captivating metaphor for the times we're living in now: the picture of God as the alpha investor -- the One with unlimited resources, a wealth of insider information, and ever-expanding horizons. The world is God's investment field, and we are the brokers entrusted with multiplying God's potent gifts.



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<sup>1</sup>William Loader, [wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtPentecost27.htm](http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MtPentecost27.htm).

This is the season of bringing in the harvest and of giving thanks,  
a great time for this parable...  
which demonstrates what this community knows well:  
our über-wealthy God loves us extravagantly,  
beyond human measure,  
without condition or limit.  
His kindness and mercy never end.  
With this God we are utterly safe.  
Saved.  
Whole.  
Rich as rich can be in the things that really matter...  
Regardless of what our balance sheets say.



The question for us is this:  
What are *we* doing with the greatest gift of all –  
God’s investment in humanity,  
God’s only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
made flesh, broken, and raised for the sake of this world God loves.



What are we doing with this generous gift of grace  
while we’re waiting for Jesus to return?

Are we opening the gift for ourselves each day

as we approach God in prayer?

Are we working the gospel news into our words and actions,  
our relationships and business dealings?

Are we living our gratitude in concrete, even flamboyant, ways?

We are free to choose.

We can give in to our fear, play it safe and bury our riches...

Or we can live out of the life of our always-generous God,  
boldly taking risks to grow God's investment of grace,  
and enter into the joy of the master.



What is in your heart right now?

Is it fear, or gratitude? Caution or hopeful anticipation?

Are you excited about the future, or wary? Are you a glass half-empty  
kind of person, or do you see your cup of blessings spilling over?

Today each of us will make a financial commitment to support the work  
God is calling us to do together in the coming year.

What is God calling *you* to invest,  
in order to train up young people in the faith?

What is God depending on *you* to give,  
to extend the spiritual benefits of Christian faith to more adults?

What is God calling *you* to risk,  
to deepen your own relationship with God,  
and help others on their journeys?

What is God calling you to add to the gifts of others that will give Pastor Josh a springboard for a strong start here as senior pastor?

God has formed this FOC and called us to work together to help bring in the kingdom.

What is your vision of the work still ahead of us?

What opportunities to love God, self, and neighbor do you see?

More young people experiencing life-changing mission trips?

More children going to Luther Crest summer camp?

Think about this: What would it mean to children in the trailer parks in our communities who have little hope of going to camp...how would it change families if FOC gave them that opportunity?

How can your faithful giving in 2012 open more doors, feed more spirits, create safe spaces for wrestling with life's challenges?

How many more hungry neighbors could we feed through Bountiful Basket or The Gathering Place or Feed My Starving Children?

What could we do to care for homeless teenagers in Carver County,  
How could we lift people out of poverty,  
Mentor college grads,  
or provide supportive fellowship for those whose hearts are aching?

How might we reach neighbors who do not have a church home with the great good news of God's welcome to all?

What will you do with the gifts that God has entrusted to you? Will you bury them in your own backyard, or will you invest them to change lives?



Most Sundays,  
it's up to the preacher to bring the sermon to an end.  
Today, that's your job.  
What is *your* response to God's gifts to you?

While Andrea plays some soft music,  
consider the financial resources God has entrusted to you  
and what portion of those gifts God is calling you to invest  
in God's work in this place in the coming year.  
Raise your hand if you need either a pledge card or a pen or pencil, and  
an usher will get that to you.

When you have settled on a weekly, monthly, or yearly commitment,  
write that amount on your card, along with your name,  
and place it in the bowl here in front.

Let us pray.

Lord God, Generous Giver of all good gifts,  
you know us completely and you love us anyway.

You know what is in our hearts; you know the dreams we dream.  
You know the calculus we do in our heads with money.  
You know what makes us hold back in fear,  
and what makes us lunge forward in hope and faith.

Guide each of us now as we make our financial commitments for the coming year, that we might be good and trustworthy servants, generous and joyful investors in the work you call us to do together, for Jesus' sake, in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen.