

Proper 28A, 2017
Church of the Holy Trinity

At this time of year, most of us church folks have stewardship on the brain. We are in the midst of rounding up pledge cards and setting budget figures. You have your stewardship mailing, and you have heard plenty of stewardship sermons over the past few months. However, stewardship is such an integral part of discipleship that we cannot afford to relegate it to only a couple of months out of every year. The parable we have heard today reminds us that stewardship of the wealth which God has given into our care is one way of describing the Christian life.

In this story told by Jesus we can find three very different models for handling the gifts we have all received from our Creator.

The first model is that of the Miser. He simply buried the gold he was given. Now, this behavior may sound so completely ridiculous to us that we find it easy to condemn. However, according to the law in Jesus' time, burying money was an acceptable way of protecting it, especially from theft. And what's more, something we in our litigious times must appreciate, if one buried the money immediately upon receipt, one was absolved of liability if it were stolen. Now that was security! So, the Miser is someone who acts with extreme caution, but legally. In this parable the Miser claimed that he acted in the way he did because he was afraid of the master. He believed his master to be unfair, and perhaps even severe...all charges which the master did not even bother to refute. Therefore, the Miser did what he did for his own justification and protection. When faced with a challenge—what to do with that which was entrusted to his care—he opted merely for survival. As a result, nothing was added, nothing grew, nothing was created. And in the end, he had even lost the gift which he had been given.

Another possibility for handling the gifts with which we have been entrusted is that of the Accountant or Banker. This is perhaps the most popular option for our time. The Accountant or Banker views all enterprise from the perspective of the bottom line. It's the business perspective, the corporate way which, more and more has become the model for our churches, also. It is all about earning interest—the very least which these slaves could have done with their master's gifts. The Accountant or Banker model puts emphasis upon turning a profit—and the bigger, the better.

And yet, it is not the net amount—the bottom line—which mattered in the end to the landowner. What was valued was not simply some minimal increase. Remember that although the first two slaves had been given different amounts—each according to his ability, says the parable—they received the same reward from their master. What was valued was their ability to create new wealth. These first two came to the master saying, “You gave me these and I have made even more.” They were creative. They had not simply made interest, but had made new wealth. They had unearthed resources that would otherwise have lain buried within. They had transcended themselves. These two model Stewardship.

As Stewards, we are called to take the gifts God has given us and to be creative, take risks, transcend ourselves. It is that loaves and fishes thing which Jesus showed the disciples. It can be a scary enterprise. It may involve budgeting by faith.

Living the Good News has to do with more than just the bottom line. It is not just a matter of survival or minimal safe return. It involves taking risks and using our creative powers. I would much rather see this parish go down in flames having risked some huge, seemingly impossible dream than to see it sit here on Main Street buried, eking out its survival.

We are called to take our potential and develop it by developing in ourselves the many different gifts which lie dormant in us until we cooperate with God in bringing them to fruition. We are called to transcend ourselves. It is not important how much we earn with our gifts; what is important is that we discover in ourselves capacities we didn't even know we had, and put them to work in God's Mission of reconciliation and restoration. We were created to go forth and multiply—and not only biologically, but in the substance of our gifts. That is because we are made to be Stewards. We are created in the image of God. And God is not a miser nor an accountant, nor a banker, but the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life abundant.

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