

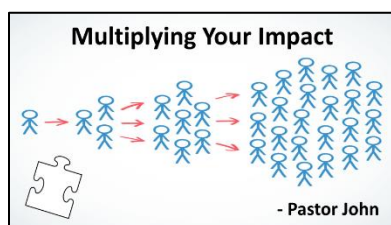
Multiplying Our Impact

November 15, 2020

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.'



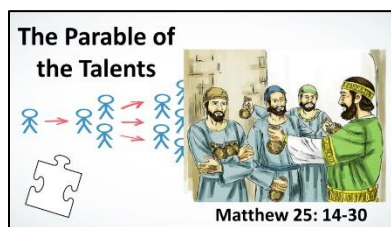
Week one we heard the call to rise up to be servant leaders. Week two we heard the challenge to be responsible for our own faith – for the oil in our lamps – and to be alert to how we can be light for others. Today, in week three, we seek to understand how to live into the expectation to multiply our impact as we live out our faith in the world. As we begin, let us begin with a word of prayer...

As we begin, let us do so with these truths: God entrusts us with many more gifts and talents than we realize, and each gift or talent are given to us for the building of the kingdom of God. The overarching question for today is this: what sort of return on investment does God expect from us?

In terms of our earthly lives, what do we invest in? In our world, many people turn to financial advisors or experts, trusting them to invest and to work to find opportunities to earn a solid return on their money. Many newlyweds choose to invest a large amount of money in their wedding photographer, hoping for a



wonderful return of beautiful memories of their special day together. Restaurant owners hire talented chefs and buy quality foods to increase sales to the public and to deepen their return on investment. Companies invest deeply in advertising and in promoting their products or services in order to gain the best possible market share, more customers, and greater profits. When we are talking about money, about financial matters, we are all interested in knowing how to gain the greatest possible return on our investments.



Today's parable, found in Matthew 25, is about a wealthy man who entrusts his slaves with some of his property – with his money. Turn with me to Matthew

25, verses fourteen through thirty. A wealthy man is going on a journey and he entrusts three of his slaves with some of his wealth. Because this parable directly follows the parable of the ten bridesmaids, we can read into it that this is also a teaching about the kingdom of heaven. The parable ends with the unworthy slave being *"thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* – a reference to an eternal consequence for the unfaithful.

The wealthy man gives to each slave *"according to his ability"*. To the first one, he gave five talents. To the second one, two talents. To the third one, one talent. Although we may initially dislike the uneven distribution of resources, there is a valid reason for the master's choice. The master sees the first slave as the most capable and the third as the least capable. Now, before we balk at this favoritism or whatever you would like to call it, consider this: would you give your hard-earned savings to a mediocre or a bad financial advisor?

In our understanding of the parable, it is also important to understand what each slave was given. A talent was a measure of weight. If we were to translate the word “talent” into a more relatable term, converted into money, would amount to about sixteen years’ worth of wages for a common laborer. It was a great amount of money that was entrusted even to the third slave.

As we continue on into verse sixteen, we see that the master’s assessment of his slaves was accurate. The first and second slaves, the ones that he entrusted the most with, *“went off at once”* to begin putting the money to work. But the third one simply hid the money in a hole in the ground. This was not an uncommon means of keeping valuables secure in the time of Jesus. Yes, this choice insured that the money would not be lost. But it also insured that it would not grow. After a long while, the master returns and the day of reckoning is at hand.

The master calls in his slaves and settles accounts with them. First, the one who had been given five steps forward and says, in verse twenty, *“See, I have made five more talents”*. Likewise, the second slave has also doubled his master’s money. In verses 21 and 23, both receive the same commendation from the

master: *“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”*. What wonderful words to hear! “Well done”,

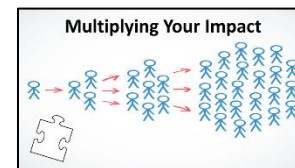
“good and trustworthy”, “put in charge of many things”, and “enter into the joy” – imagine hearing these things from your boss, your teacher, your spouse, your coach. Imagine hearing these words from God.

“Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master”.

- Matthew 25: 21 and 23

As is still the case today, the reward for good work is the opportunity to do further work. The future looks bright for the first two slaves.

Lastly, the third slave comes forward. He has heard the benefits of multiplying the impact of trust and of hard work.



He has heard the words of praise given to the two slaves who doubled the master's money. Now he comes forward. In verses 24 and 25, with full honesty, the third slave says, *"Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours"*. The third man was afraid to lose any of what he had been given. But his words indicate that he knew that the master expected him to do something with the money. As much is revealed when the masters tells him that he could have at least earned interest on the money. The master calls him *"wicked and lazy"* and takes the one talent that he has and gives it to the one who had ten. The master sees that this slave will not make good use of the talent that he has been given. He has had the talent for a long time and has done nothing with it. So, it is taken from him. The third slave is then tossed out into the darkness, to a place of suffering and pain.

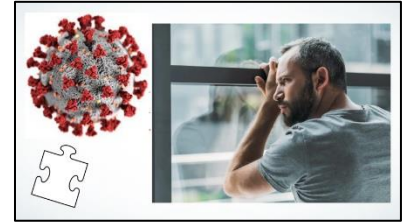
As we think about the big picture of the parable, we see that each servant was treated as they expected to be treated by the master. Two were treated well and one was treated harshly. I believe that the same will be true for us when we stand before Jesus. Inside, we each know if we are or are not living the life that we should live. The master acted as he was expected to act.

In much the same way, don't we usually get the God we expect to get? If we expect judgment, we are judged. If we expect God to be merciful, we receive mercy. If we see God as an enforcer of the law, we get hung up on the rules. If we expect forgiveness from God, we receive forgiveness and in turn are people who offer forgiveness.

Perhaps you are like I am at times. Perhaps you look at your neighbors or co-workers or teammates or fellow pastors and think, "Boy are they talented. Look at how much God has blessed them". Life may seem so much easier for others. Yet even if life is easier, even if they are more gifted, even if they have so much more than us, God has still poured more blessings into our lives than we know what to do with. How would you or I live differently if we fully grasped just how abundantly God has "invested" in each of us? As people of faith, this a question that we should ponder and wrestle with. We should be thinking about how we invest what God has entrusted us with for the building of the kingdom of God here and now.

For the people living at the time of Matthew's gospel, the second coming of Jesus was prayed for and celebrated, not feared. They believed that the will of God would be done. They trusted that the kingdom of heaven would come. Therefore, they lived with hope and peace, with joy and assurance. In these uncertain times of COVID-19, as believers, we can lean into the hope, peace, joy, and assurance that we find in our relationship with Jesus Christ. We trust in eternity. When we think about the potential of multiplying our impact, we most often think in terms of the community of faith.

In these times, many are feeling the weight of loneliness and isolation bearing down on them. The reality of the world is that not all people are people of faith. Not all of our neighbors and coworkers and friends place their trust in God. As we continue on into the eighth month of the pandemic and as we see record numbers of cases and hospitalizations and deaths, many people are becoming more isolated, more careful, more alone. The disease is taking its toll on people in a myriad of ways – physically, emotionally, and relationally. As people of faith, we have much to offer those experiencing loneliness and isolation, fear and worry. The love, joy, hope, peace, and assurance that we find in our faith are blessings and gifts that we can offer to others. Some of the other gifts or talents that many of us have are compassion and empathy. This is the proverbial oil in our lamps that we are called to shine out into the world.



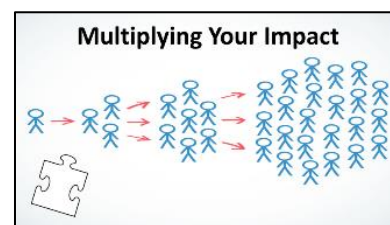
With these gifts and talents, we can offer connection and community to many who are lonely and isolated and afraid. Noticing which neighbors are not going out and about, which coworkers or classmates have been absent for a while, which friends or family members have become quiet or even silent on Facebook and so on – noticing will alert us to those who might be struggling with loneliness or isolation right now. We need to reach out, to communicate God's



love, to help connect them to us and to others. Today as you sat down, I hope you found a few invitation cards.

I hope and pray that you will use a few of these cards to offer a place for those who are lonely and isolated, for those who feel stress and anxiety, for those needing hope and love and peace and joy. Please use these cards to invite a friend, a family member, a coworker, a neighbor to become a part of Grace United Methodist Church. There is information on the card for Advent and for Christmas Eve. Our web site is on there if they just want to join us online. The phone number is listed if they have questions. Please, please, please use these cards to reach out to someone who needs to be surrounded by community and who need to find a place to belong this Advent season and beyond.

This card is just one way that you can extend the love of Christ to another. It is just a small act of love to invite someone to a place or community where they can find hope and belonging. Small acts of love can make a huge difference in people's lives. A simple act of love can be multiplied many times over. To illustrate how that can happen and to help you think about how and where you can offer simple acts of love, I want to share a true story with you this morning.



Ted was not what one would call the teacher's pet. He was turned off by school. Ted was very sloppy in appearance, expressionless, unattractive. Many looked down upon him, even his teacher. Miss Thompson enjoyed bearing down on her red pen as she placed X's beside his many wrong answers.

Christmas arrived. The children piled elaborately wrapped gifts on their teacher's desk. Ted brought one too. It was wrapped in brown paper and held together with Scotch Tape. Miss Thompson opened each gift, as the children crowded around to watch. Out of Ted's package fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half of the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. The children began to snicker. But she silenced them by splashing some of the perfume on her wrist and letting them smell it. She put the bracelet on too.

At day's end, after the other children had left, Ted came by the teacher's desk and said, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother. And the bracelet looks real pretty on you. I'm glad you like my presents." Then he left. It broke her heart and she started to see him in a new light. The next day, the children were greeted by a reformed teacher, one committed to loving each of them. Especially the slow ones. Especially Ted.

Surprisingly, or maybe not surprisingly, Ted began to show great improvement. He actually caught up with most of the students and even passed a few.

Time came and went. Miss Thompson heard nothing from Ted for a long time. Then, one day, she received this note:

Dear Miss Thompson: I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Ted

Four years later, another note arrived:

Dear Miss Thompson: They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Ted

And four years later:

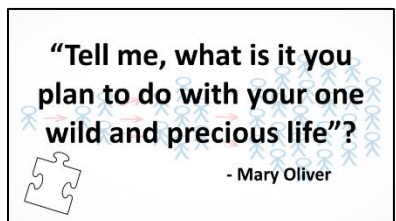
Dear Miss Thompson: As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year.

Miss Thompson attended that wedding and sat where Ted's mother would have sat. Miss Thompson did only a little thing by wearing that perfume and bracelet. But the love that she made known, beginning with that small act, had a profound impact upon Ted.

God entrusts us each with gifts and talents. When we allow love to open the door just a little bit, like Miss Thompson did, we will be amazed by what God can and will do. Ted, of course, was not the only child that experienced a different teacher after that afternoon when they opened some Christmas presents. She learned that investing in a child's life, pouring love into each one, would be multiplied many times over. But the large number of children impacted is not what this story is really about. In the bigger sense, faith is not about keeping a score sheet, about tracking each of our successes, one by one by one.

After all, God is not the great accountant in the sky. We do not have to save so many to earn our way into heaven. But God does know exactly what he has invested in each of us. God knows exactly what gifts and talents he placed in us when he created us. Now, again, God is not transactional, calculating exactly what he must get out of each of us to be pleased with the return. Instead, God is simply generous. God's generosity towards us is not an expectation but an invitation, an invitation to practice generosity in return, using whatever gifts and talents that we have received from God to bless others. If this parable is really about love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and such, then the only way to double it is to give it away. This is what we see in the parable. The two who invested what they were given were not only blessed with the original "talents" but with a great return on their investments as well. This was and is an example of the extravagant economy of God's grace and love.

God has entrusted each and every one of us with a wide variety of gifts, skills, talents, opportunities, loved ones, and blessings. God has given us more than we could ever count or calculate. God has entrusted us with these gifts and talents so that we will use them to bless others and to bring a return for God's glory. Upon reflecting on this parable, theologian Mary Oliver posed this question: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life"? Well, my friends, what is your plan? How will you use God's blessings to bless others this week? May your plan be to shine the light, to share the love, and to bring God the glory. Amen and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When have you used a talent or gift and then experienced God giving you more of that talent? How can you share this experience?
- 2) *Pray*. What will you do with the gifts and talents that God has given you in this upcoming week? In the season of Advent? Pray for guidance!
- 3) *Study*. Re-read last week's passage: Matthew 25: 1-13. Why does Matthew place these parables in this order? How do our personal and corporate responsibilities overlap or work together when living out our faith?