



THE TIMID SERVANT PLANTS A MONEY TREE

Nov. 19, 2017 Mt. 25: 14-30 & Prob. 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31

[www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Connie May © 10/13/17

Drawing with permission by Fr. Robert Beck

Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [Freedom of Creative Fire](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Real and False Humility](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

[Youtube link](#)

#### ENTERING THE SCENE:

“In first-century Mediterranean culture people believed that all goods already exist and are already distributed. There is no more where this came from, and the only way to get more is to defraud another. Anyone who suddenly acquired something "more" was automatically judged to be a thief. Wealthy people were especially under suspicion. How could they honorably increase their wealth? They commissioned slaves to handle their affairs. Everyone knew slaves were shameless, and dishonorable behavior was all one could expect from them. ... The third slave did what the rabbis would later commend as the safest and therefore most honorable course of action for a freeman.

Pilch, John J. [The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle A](#). The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1995. Page 164.

Mt. 25:14-30

14 Again, it will be like a man going on a **journey**, who called his servants and **entrusted** his property to them. 15 To one he gave five **talents** of money, to another two **talents**, and to another one **talent**, each according to his **ability**. Then he went on his **journey**. 16 The man who had received the five **talents** went at once and put his money to **work** and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two **talents** gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, **dug a hole** in the ground and **hid** his master's money. 19 After a **long time** the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five **talents** brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you **entrusted** me with five **talents**. See, I have gained five more.' 21 His master replied, 'Well done, **good and faithful** servant! You have been faithful with a **few** things; I will put you in charge of **many** things. Come and **share** your master's **happiness!**' 22 The man with the two **talents** also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you **entrusted** me with two **talents**; see, I have gained two more.' 23 His master replied, 'Well done, **good and faithful** servant! You have been **faithful** with a **few** things; I will put you in charge of **many** things. Come and **share** your master's **happiness!**' 24 Then the man who had received the one **talent** came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a **hard** man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was **afraid** and went out and **hid** your **talent** in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' 26 His master replied, 'You **wicked, lazy** servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on **deposit** with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with **interest**. 28 Take the **talent** from him and give it to the one who has the ten **talents**. 29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that **worthless** servant outside, into the **darkness**, where there will be **weeping and gnashing** of teeth.'

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Jesus teaches we are to live our lives without fear of failure. How am I doing with this?

**PRAYER:** Lord, I can identify with each of these servants since I have responded in various ways to the opportunities you have given me to just do the right thing. When I am feeling empowered, I am willing and able to be creative, but when I am afraid I want to 'bury' my talent to protect it. Help me to rely on your promise of unconditional love in such a way that the creative times outnumber the fearful ones. Amen.

#### WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**JOURNEY:** To be on a journey is to say that you have someplace to go. Jesus is very aware that he will be going to the Father soon. *If you were one of the people hearing Jesus talk about himself in this manner, what sense do you think you would have made of it? If you were a disciple? A scribe or Pharisee? A wealthy person? A slave? (See information below)*

**ENTRUSTED:** To be entrusted is to have someone give you something, knowing you will take good care of it.

*What has the master given you to take care of? Are you able to risk using it or them? What abilities or duties are you afraid to use for fear of failing?*

**TALENTS:** (see below) A talent was an enormous amount of something. It was several years wages in that time.  
*What have you been given an enormous amount of?*

**ABILITY:** The master knew his servants well, and challenged them up to the limit of their abilities.  
*Do you feel God has given you abilities? What are they? Has anyone ever suggested that you have an ability that you have shied away from accepting because of limited imagination? What was that?*

**WORK:** Genesis begins by describing God's work of creation. To work is to share in God's creative process.  
*Do you have a sense that your abilities/talents are gifts given by God to share in God's ongoing creative process? What work are you doing now that stretches your abilities and doubles your investment?*

**DUG A HOLE:** Jewish law provided a safeguard for the friend who was entrusted money by another. It held that you were not liable for buried money that was lost.  
*Did this provision of the law give the third servant an out? Would you have used this safeguard?*

**HID:** To hide something is to put it where only you know where it is with the intention of coming back for it later on.  
*Are you hiding any talents these days? If so, why? When do you plan to come back to it?*

**LONG TIME:** The people were beginning to despair over the long delay of Jesus' second coming.  
*With Advent approaching, what are you expecting this year?*

**GOOD:** To do something good for someone is to further their well-being.  
*How did the first two servants further the masters well-being? What did they discover for themselves in the process??*

**FAITHFUL:** To be faith-full is to trust fully in someone.  
*How were the servants full of faith? What did they have faith in?*

**FEW:** A few are a small amount.  
*Do you feel your talents are just a few? What does this parable suggest can be done with your few?*

**MANY:** To have many is to have abundance.  
*By courageous risky work, the servants doubled what was given them. What do you have that you could double if you worked hard and took some risks?*

**SHARE:** The work of creating is a risk taking. Those who risked were invited to share the happiness of the master.  
*What does this suggest to you about your life? What does it say about the master?*

**HAPPINESS:** Happiness is something that comes as a gift. When we strive to be happy, it often seems phony. When we do what we know we should and can do, we discover happiness waiting for us.  
*What happiness have you discovered? What led to this happiness? Did it feel like a gift?*

**HARD:** The third servant saw the master as a hard man. This perception led him to take the safe path.  
*Do you see God as a hard God? Does this lead you towards safety instead of faith-filled risk taking?*

**AFRAID:** There are two energies in life; love and fear. The third servant feels that if he uses his talent he might lose it.  
*What does this fear produce for the third servant? Have you ever gnashed your teeth because you responded out of fear instead of love?*

**WICKED:** The timid often project their fears on everyone, thereby becoming wicked.  
*Have you ever found yourself doing something wicked because you were afraid? What was that all about?*

**LAZY:** The master saw beneath the excuses of the servant and identified the problem as laziness.  
*Has your laziness ever caused you to react in fear? Could love produce a better result even though you might have to work hard to accomplish the deed?*

**DEPOSIT:** To deposit something is to put it somewhere for safekeeping.  
*Why do you think the servant neglected to do this with the moneylenders and instead hid it in a hole? Did the law help him?*

**INTEREST:** Charging interest to fellow Jews was against the religious law. Once again the problem of what law to follow complicates things for the listeners of Jesus parables.

*Do you sympathize with the third servant, given these complications? Have you ever had to choose between doing the safe thing and the loving thing? What helped you make your decision?*

**ABUNDANCE:** Creative risk taking can produce abundantly.

*What abundance have you created lately? Did you have to risk anything to achieve this abundance?*

**WORTHLESS:** The servant's fear of the master produced nothing of worth.

*Has fear of God done this to you?*

**DARKNESS:** We say we are in the dark when we talk about not knowing something. We look for darkness when we want to hide from something or someone.

*Is there any talent that you are hiding from today? Can God's unconditional love give you enough 'light' to see what that might be and enable you to risk growing into it?*

**WEEPING:** We weep when we are sad.

*What was the servant weeping about? Was he sad about being thrown into the darkness of ignorance, or was it consciousness of his own fear-based living?*

**GNASHING:** To gnash is to grind ones teeth out of anger.

*Which do you think caused the gnashing for this servant? Was it both?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Mt. 25:14-30// Lk. 19:12-27; Mt. 25:21 // Lk. 16:10; Mt. 25:29 // Mt. 13:12; Mk. 4:25; Lk. 8:18, 19, 26;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Prov. 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; [Ps. 128: 1-5](#); 1 Thes. 5:1-6; Mt. 25:14-20;

Revised Common Lectionary: Judges 4:1-7 [Ps. 123](#); 1 Thes. 5:1-11; Mt. 25:14-20;

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

According to the dictionary, a "talent" is "a special ability that allows someone to do something well." Like playing the piano. But it came to mean that only after a long career in the language. It began as a measure of volume, the amount that a large stone jar of the ancient world, an amphora, could hold. From volume it went to weight. It meant the equivalent in weight of that amount of water, an amphora-full. Approximately 130 pounds. It was the largest unit of weight at the time. After a time, it then became a measure of value, the equivalent of that weight in precious metals, most likely silver. In exceptional cases, gold. It was, in effect, the heaviest measurable amount of the most precious metal. That is, it was the largest sum they had available to them. And that is what it means in the parable. Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pg. 209.. 209-212.

Only the servant who acted out of a concern for the consequences failed the test. This is different from acting out of a need to show a return on the gift, since there is no consideration of returns. It is just gift. So what needs to be done, for the very reason it needs to be done. This is different from risk, because if there are no consequences to be concerned about, there is nothing obvious to risk. It is just doing what faithfulness asks to be done. Pgs 172-3. Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 20011.

Jesus promised his disciples three things -- that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble.

Do you qualify? - F.R. Maltby

There's nothing I'm afraid of like scared people. Robert Frost

Fear is no policy; it represents the absence of courage and a poverty of imagination. To be defined by our fears is to accept as normal the lowest possible level of emotional intelligence. The risk of indulging in the fear factor is that not only will we not overcome our fears, but we will become dependent upon the means to control and contain them.

Gomes, Peter J. The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus. NY. Harper Collins. 2007.

If the world thus provides a habitable framework for risk taking, it becomes clear that no risk taking takes place in a vacuum. Risk and fate cannot be pitted against each another, because the former always takes place within the framework of the latter. Expressed in theological terms, *the world is created by a benevolent God in such a manner that it invites a risk-taking attitude and rewards it in the long term.* Risk taking is a non-zero-sum game. The gifts of risk taking are overall greater than the potential damages, and by risking one's life one does not take anything away from others; the risk taker explores new territories rather than exploiting the domains of the neighbor. Gregersen, Neils Henrik. [Rick and Religion: toward a Theology of Risk Taking.](#) Zygon. 6/03. Pg. 368.

[Clement of Alexandria](#), *Miscellanies* 1.28.177 and frequently elsewhere - "Be skillful bankers, rejecting some things but retaining what is good."

[Gospel according to the Hebrews](#) (in Eusebius, *Theophany*): The gospel written in Hebrew characters which has reached our hands, turns the threat not against the man who hid, but against him who had lived riotously; for it told of three servants, one who wasted his master's substance with harlots and female flute players, one who multiplied it by trading, and one who hid the talent; and made one to be accepted, and one to be only rebuked, and one to be shut up in prison.  
Throckmorton, Burton, Jr. Ed. [Gospel Parallels](#). NY. Thomas Nelson Pub. 1949.

[Talent](#): The largest unit of weight in the ancient world equal to 75.56 lbs. and used to denote money in the Christian scriptures.

In a third century Gnostic text supposedly written by Simon Peter discovered at Nag Hammadi, we find in Saying 83-4: "Therefore I said, 'To everyone who has, it will be given, and that one will have plenty. But the one who does not have' – that is, the one of this place, being completely dead and changed by the planting of creation and begetting, 84 who, if one of the immortal essence appears, thing that he (i.e. the one of immortal essence) is being seized – 'it will be taken from him.' And it will be added to the one who is. You, therefore, be courageous and do not fear anything. For I will be with you so that none of your enemies will prevail over you. Peace be to you! Be strong!"  
Ehrman, Bart. [After the New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998. Page 230.

"I need to be trusting enough to know that God will give me more than I ever dreamed of if I am just faithful to the people I am here for." Henri Nouwen

Christ himself rebuked not only those who refused to lose their lives, but just as sternly those who refused to live their lives, to maximize their talents and opportunities. Pg. 461. Lewis, Alan E. [Between Cross and Resurrection](#). Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. 2001.

"Go ahead! Courage! In the spiritual life, those who do not go forward go backwards. It is the same with a boat which must always go forward. If it stands still, the wind will blow it back." - Padre Pio

Give God your all. He doesn't ask us to give Him only what we would consider perfect. Give Him everything, every scrap, every part of us, everything you've kept hidden on the back shelf of your heart. Give him those things that you judge as not good enough. Hand over those areas of your life that appear to be too broken to be used. God can and will transform the good, the bad, what you deem the ugly. Let Him sift and sort things through. You'll be amazed at what the Master Creator can make out of what you might consider the shambles of your heart. - Katherine Walden

Mt. 25.14–30: Parable of the talents (Lk 19.11–27). Cf. 18.23–35; 25.1–13. 15: Talents, equal to several years' wages. 19: The master . . . came, Jesus' second coming. Settled accounts, final judgment in which all are held accountable for their actions (18.23). 25: Hid your talent, people buried money to keep it safe from thieves (cf. Horace, Sat. 1.1.41–42). Here the phrase refers to those who fail to act righteously. 29–30: Lk 8.18; 13.28. For to all those who have, more will be given, see Gos. Thom. 41; cf. b. Ber. 40a; 55a. Outer darkness, 8.12; 22.13. Pg. 47. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

Going out to another in love means risk - the risks of self-disclosure, rejection, misunderstanding. It means grief, too, from the temporary separations, psychological or physical, to the final separation of death. Whoever insists on personal security and safety as the nonnegotiable conditions of life will not be willing to pay love's price or find love's enrichments. Whoever shuts himself or herself up in the cocoon of self-protective defenses, keeping others always at a safe distance and holding on tightly to personal possessions and privacy, will find the price of love far too high and will remain forever a prisoner of fear.  
- John Powell S.J., *The Secret of Staying in Love*

Good people who want good things do awful things when they are afraid and can't see the forest for the trees. Dr. David Hirstius

Fear is a desolate boneyard where our dreams go to desiccate in the hot sun. [John Chuchman](#)

## SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: [www.theark1.com](http://www.theark1.com)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2014. Pgs. 209-212. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2008. Pgs. 170-173. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle A 2001. Pgs. 170-173. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)