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The Message: How Much are you Worth?

This parable seems to value the lives of the protagonists by 'talents.'

What is a biblical talent?

It is a piece of metal -- gold or silver -- about an inch thick, 30 inches long, 15 wide, rectangular but with handles on each corner so that it can be carried by more than one person. It's about 75 lb -- the weight of a person back then. And it also represented the salary of one person for a lifetime.

I wonder if I could have a couple of volunteers. Here is what a talent would have looked like, felt like. Except it would have been silver or gold and be about a half inch thicker -- and heavier.

(walk it around so people can get a closer look)

A boss gives money to invest before going away. Each is given according to their perceived ability. The first two do well and double their investment; the last digs a hole for safe keeping. Upon the boss's return, it's judgment time.

The first two are rewarded as good and faithful servants and share their boss's joy. The last describes his master as hard, and basically a thief!! And the master is furious and takes his talent and gives it to the one who made the most profit for the master. And the useless servant is thrown out into the dark. Harsh parable.

If we think of the salary of a person over a lifetime, we are likely thinking in the millions today. So it is as if the master gave one servant 5 million, one 2 million, one 1 million -- basically saying there are 5 million dollar people, 2 million dollar people and 1 million dollar people.

How much are you worth? Are you a 5 million dollar person, a 2 million dollar person? A 1 million dollar person?

We do each carry a number on our backs. I was reminded of that while watching a program about a building collapse -- errors were made, but the owner of the building looked at the difference between compensating families by any deaths that might have been caused and repairing the mistakes. How did he do that? Well there are actuarial tables for that sort of thing.

A lot of energy goes into valuing a life -- actuaries, insurance companies, economists, safety analysts, personal injury lawyers

Statistical Value of life

Australia \$4 million

Russia \$70 000

US Dept of Transportation and Environmental Protection - \$9 million+, Food and Drug \$8 million

It's hard to find Canadian stats for the value of a human life. When An Afghan was killed by mistake by Canadian troops, the amount of compensation is censored, but seemed to be in the \$2000 to \$9000 range.

Medical Malpractice in Ontario -- \$8 - 12 million.

So depending on who you are and where you are, values differ.

The three protagonists in this story are worth different amounts. Each is given a challenge commensurate with his abilities.

The challenge that Jesus makes to us in this story is to accept the opportunities we have in life. We are the ones who have tremendous service to give. Have we done that? Or do we bury our opportunities through fear?

1. What we have comes from God.

The servant thought the talent was his to do with as *he* decided. He tells the master, You're a tough guy. So instead of doing as the master asked -- to use, to tend, to invest, to share -- he buried it. He did nothing with it. But the talent belonged to the master! He gave it to the servant to invest.

Here is a strong message that we are to use what God gives us to the best of our ability..
It means we are investing well when we use what God gives us for the purpose God intends.

And success is expressed in this way: 'Well done! You are good and trustworthy; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

When you use what God gives you, God will give you more responsibility and you will please God. The third servant doesn't realize that self interest and God's interest are one and the same.

2. Secondly, the servant is stuck in a mindset of scarcity.

'My gifts aren't much -- not as great as everyone else's.' 'I don't have many talents -- not like so and so who is so great.'

'I'm not rich like so and so -- I don't have enough money to make a difference.'

He doesn't think that what he does matters.

The servant behaves as if what he has is so little that it won't matter if he just digs a hole and buries it. Instead of seeing what he does have, he sees only what he does not have.

3. Third, the servant plays it safe, and won't take any risks on behalf of the one he's serving.

The others took the talents they were given and traded them until they were double what they started. That's a pretty good return on their investments, isn't it? But no doubt, things could have gone the other way, and they might have lost what they had been given by the master. They had to take a risk, and have a little faith that they could take what they had care of and make more from it. The third person was not willing to risk anything to gain anything.

The message in this situation is, 'invest boldly, use your gifts generously.'

But this servant reacts from fear -- or maybe he's lazy and uses the master's reputation as an excuse. Whatever, he doesn't invest the money, doesn't use the resources he has been given to do anything.

It all comes from God.

God will provide.

God expects us to risk generously.

God sees our generosity of risk as love for God.

For this church this year, this story is a challenge.

If you are members of this church, you have been given a great gift. What we do with what we have matters a lot this year. With a surprising number of vacancies, there will be a lot of churches vying for ministers.

To welcome First neighbours, we want to show that we are in a position to be good hosts.

If we want to be the most attractive to the best candidates, we want to be in the best shape possible - and that includes the best financial shape. You deserve the best.

Strategies for Giving

If you don't think you have abundance, I'd like to provoke some thought about competing good causes. A lot of good causes have a donor base in the millions. Some in the thousands. For churches like ours, it's in the low hundreds.

Recognizing that, our family choose a few of those big donor based charities to support each year, ones we have a special connection or passion for and no time to devote to volunteering for them.

But to those others that come in the mail, we give thanks for all those donors who will respond. And to those who phone or knock on our door we say, "I give to my church, who in turn make a difference in the community and the world. And I will be happy to make a donation to x charity, if you will make the same donation to my church."

And then, when you are filling out your pledge card, think about those extra \$10 and \$20 that won't make much difference to those charities that have millions of people donating and running marathons on Sundays -- but will make a difference to us whose giving base is much smaller.

We sometimes operate out this culture of scarcity. In other words, we, like the servant, focus more on what we don't have than on what we do have. "I only have one talent, so I'll bury it in the backyard." When one talent is the value of a human life, or at least a lifetime's salary, one talent is abundance!

Be brave; don't make decisions on the basis of fear; and remember whose resources you are working with: God's! What we have – our money, our time, the things we excel at, our possessions, you name it – all of it belongs to God first. All a gift of God's grace.

We are building a church and supporting a community of faith that *matters*. Let's risk our "talents" on our present and our future church."