

The daring family member or friend shows up. Even when Thanksgivings of the past have been exhausting or caused frustration and hurt. I think you know what I'm talking about when I say this: to be in relationship with people, you have to keep showing up. Not just in body, but also in mind, heart, and soul. Lots of people show up for Thanksgiving with family or friends without showing up. You know, they watch the game all day long, or babble on about themselves, oblivious to the people around them. Or they hide in the kitchen all day, grumbling inside that no one is being very helpful.

But the daring Christian disciple shows up at Thanksgiving, shows up in the family, shows up at church and in the neighborhood – willing to serve and eager to listen. The daring disciple takes the trash out and sometimes simply takes trash from others. The daring disciple is vulnerable to getting hurt, but still willing to speak up about her or his truth, and does not squirrel the self away in a little safe hiding place, at least not for long. If you are being abused in any way, by all means, find a safe place, get away from the one battering you. But I am talking about the normal hurts of life – that all of us experience.

Jesus told a parable about servants of their master who were given different gifts according to their ability to manage them. Those who got more, risked more, and gained more. The anxious one risked nothing and gained nothing. It's like last week's passage about reaping what you sow – as in seeds. When we were discussing this in youth class, we discovered that sowing with an "o" was not a well-known term. The verses that precede this parable are all about being ready for the coming of the Lord, about being watchful and awake, a whole chapter on being prepared for end times. Who knows – perhaps we are in end times. Nuclear warfare could do it. I hope it does not happen but are you ready? Hear the parable that follows talk about end times:

### Matthew 25:14-30

"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup> But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> 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.' <sup>21</sup> 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.' <sup>22</sup> 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.' <sup>23</sup> 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.' <sup>24</sup> 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; <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup> 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? <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (NRS)

This is a rather harsh parable. Let us remember that parables are stories that Christ tells us to help us understand God's mysterious truth. They are not to be parsed like science or accounting, but like poetry and good fiction.

I wonder where you found yourself in the parable. Were you a daring servant or a cautious one? And how did you think about the word, “talent” originally meaning weight of money, as in silver, but later, through the reading of this parable, by the 13-14<sup>th</sup> century the word “talent” came to be understood as innate ability or desire or will, and the last couple of hundred years understood as special giftedness. We say skills can be developed but talent is what is there to help the skills develop into a beautiful gift, often admired by others.

But back to the original meaning, in Jesus’ day, a single talent was a huge portion of money – the equivalent of 16-19 years of work. So when you know that, you might be less inclined to feel sorry for the servant who was tossed into outer darkness for burying his talent. Knowing you wasted potential is an outer darkness. Surely he could have done something fruitful with the equivalent of 16-19 years of work. I think this parable is not just about money. Whew, the congregation breathes a sigh of relief. Jesus and the preacher talk a lot about money! Money is a symbol in life. Think about 16-19 years of work wasted – not just the compensation – but the work itself.

Yes, I think Jesus was making a point about using whatever talent you’ve been given to make life meaningful, to accomplish things, to build community, to serve God and all humankind. He’s saying, “Don’t be scared to put yourself out there and risk a daring discipleship to live a bold and adventuresome life, because life is brief and who knows, it may be over soon. So why are we afraid to be daring? Well you might say, *I don't mind taking a risk, as long as I know everything will turn out okay.*

Yes, taking risks means you can lose something. But we forget that being too safe means you can lose as well. Some people only come to church for Sunday worship occasionally, while others invest time and energy building relationships by coming to classes and Bible studies and fellowship events. They go out together to serve and engage the community with extraordinary acts of love and kindness. They feel engaged, sometime frustrated, but engaged.

Those who show up occasionally will often disappear and if you ask them why, they will often say, “I just don’t feel connected.”

If you want to have meaningful community life here, you have to be here, investing yourself in relationships. It's not easy. It takes time and energy. It is messy. You might have some awkward moments. You might get your feelings hurt. You might be oil to someone else's water. But keep looking around, find someone whose got flour and sugar and your oil and water might be able to mix. Find some chocolate and you could become delicious brownies, a blessing to all. Keep experimenting to find your comfortable spot, because this is a diverse congregation and the PCUSA is a big tent. We're different, we've come from different places in the world, different backgrounds, cultures, church traditions or no tradition at all. It takes some time to figure out how to blend our talents into something beautiful and delicious – that will be nourishing and will multiple the talents.

Several of us were investing ourselves in Peace River Presbytery this week, and learned something very valuable from Rodger Nishioka our guest speaker. Research shows it takes 17 continuous hours with the same group of people (not a changing group) to build trusted friendships. That's why I encourage you to join the Men's and Women's weekday groups or the choir or bells or the Beth-El Baggers, any other group that meets regularly at Peace to form deeper relationships. That's why in Lent, we are going to encourage you to come for five straight Wednesday evenings for a simple supper and Lenten life groups.

If you are only showing up on Sundays and not even every Sunday, you are not building a friendship that can sustain you during difficult times. The Holy Spirit is great at helping us bond in Christian love, but we have to participate in the process – with our whole selves, vulnerable and open to others. We are made in the image of God, and God is relational. God is a Trinity, a dance of three in perfect relationship so that means that the people in God's image are meant for relationship.

A true sense of belonging only happens when we present our whole selves, imperfect though we are, in community with a deep sense of our own God-given talent. Fear can come disguised as practicality. The servant who loses everything in the parable was being very practical. Use it or lose it.

The fearful will always be in protective, practical mode, as if sharing talent, time, treasure, self is too great a risk. No, when you give to others, investing in them generously, then you find yourself expanded, broader, more valuable, more connected, multiplying talent by combining it with others. Like much of the Christian faith, this is a paradox. As Jesus said, “Those who wish to save their lives will lose them, but those who give up their lives for my sake and for the Gospel will save them.” Grateful people are generous. Dare to share.

I want to end with a story I heard from our own Peace friends, Carol and Shirley Harkins last Sunday. Carol Harkins just broke her arm. Her mother Shirley uses a wheelchair. They were having a tough time last week-end getting the shopping done. Shirley said, “We were feeling sorry for ourselves, struggling along, when a mother and son came up to help us get to the car with our shopping cart. The young mom was missing a leg and the boy had a limp. As they got to the car, Carol and Shirley found out that the woman’s other young child was killed in a boating accident. Instead of wallowing in grief over their own losses, this family dared to keep their focus on giving thanks to God in all circumstances and helping others to do the same.