

“GOD TRUSTED ME WITH IT!”
A Sermon Preached at
FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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(transcribed from audio file)

Today’s scripture is from Matthew 25:14-30.

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. At once the one who had received the five talents went off and traded with them and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 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.’ 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.’ 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.’ 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.’ 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, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ 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? 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. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' NRSVue

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

A couple of months ago I got to attend one of the Oasis Reunion Concerts in Chicago. Oasis is a very popular British rock band. Very popular in the 90's. I don't know if any of you know about them. Songs - Wonderwall, Don't Look Back in Anger, Champagne Supernova. Big hits back then. Let's just say I'm a big fan and it's a big deal. They've been able to figure out that at these limited concerts that they've done all over the world, that for every seat that was sold, there were 10 other people trying to get that seat. That's how many people were trying to get tickets. It involved a lot of staying up and hitting the keys on my keyboard at just the right moment to get these tickets that we got. And we were so excited to be there. Right?

So, there was this one moment in the concert where the lead singer said, "All right I'm going to have you all do the Poznan." Now you probably don't know what the Poznan is, but if you're a deep cut Oasis fan you know what it is because you know that their favorite soccer team is Manchester City and the Poznan is a cheer that the Manchester City football club in England does. So, you need to know about this to understand what's about to happen in this concert.

Many years ago, there was a soccer team called Lech Poznan – a Polish Soccer team and they were pretty good, and they had this cheer that they would do. So, when their team was doing well, they would do this cheer where they would all turn their backs to the soccer field, embrace one another and hop up and down in unison. The idea is that our team is so good, we don't even need to watch. And it creates this really cool visual effect of almost like this wave flowing over the entire stadium whenever they would do this.

So, as legend goes, they showed up, came to Manchester, playing against Manchester City one year and Manchester City just annihilated them and towards the end of the game, in mockery all the Manchester City fans turned around and did the Poznan at the other team. And they had so much fun doing it that they continued to do it. And to this day, Manchester City fans will do the Poznan which involves turning your back and all jumping together so

At the concert, let's do the Poznan. For those who don't know what it is, you turn around, embrace your neighbor next to you and just bounce with the music. So, they

begin that guitar rip and 60,000 people at Soldier Field in Chicago – just imagine that. All of them turning around, embracing arms and this wave going. I would love to tell you....I don't think I can describe to you what it's like to see 60,000 people all doing that at once.

The main reason I can't tell you that is because it was only 59,999 people who did it. The one person who didn't do it was standing right behind me. Do you know how awkward it was? I'm with 59,999 of my fellow Oasis fans and we're going "oui, oui, oui" and there is just this person right behind me who is just standing still and staring. I mean they are doing the dead fisheye look right into my face. It felt like....and I'm like "Well, this is awkward as you're right here and we're doing this."

It raised some questions for me. I couldn't help but look at this person. Even though they had their concert T-shirt on, I thought to myself, do you really love this band? Huh? I mean do you really want to waste the price that was paid, so that you could be here? These aren't cheap tickets. Do you really want to miss out on what it's like to be a part of this? And finally, do you realize how your non-participation affects the people around you? Like me.

Now I know some of you are thinking, look Rob, maybe they just didn't want to do it. Okay? Maybe they didn't. Maybe they had their reasons, but none the less, non-participation has consequences, and that's the point of today's scripture lesson.

It's a lesson that is talking about a particular parable where you have this owner and he is given talents. Now it's wonderful for the English language that it is called talents because we think of the talents that we have and it is a great metaphor for that because it's not just a monetary amount that we receive in our life, but all of the talents, all of the gifts that we have, this is meant to be speaking towards. And it says each was given a different amount according to their ability – their ability to him. So, it's not that everybody has the same talents, the same gifts, the same resources given to them in this life, the same blessings. It's acknowledged within this, but it's done each according to their abilities to be good stewards is the idea.

You may think, oh well, to the one that was just given a little bit, maybe they should get a pass. But this scripture clearly says, "Look, even if the gift is small, you have a responsibility to use it, to use what you have. And if you don't, there are consequences and the consequences that are laid out here are, you are going to be cast out to the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." Weeping and gnashing of teeth! It doesn't sound good, does it?

This is an expression that Matthew actually uses in his gospel six times and all through different stories that are told. It starts off in Matthew 8 telling the story of a Roman Centurion who wants to have his servant healed by Jesus and Jesus does it. Then Jesus says, “Look, this one might be in for his faith, but the sons of Abraham, those who are part of the faith, if they don’t have this kind of faith, they’re going to be out in the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

It goes on. There are two parables that are told in the 13th chapter of Matthew, and it talks about a crop that is grown and inside that community, that crop there are weeds and those weeds will be pulled, and they will be cast out to the place of, you guessed it – weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It goes on to talk about a net will be cast, and this is in like the 13th chapter, and there is a parable of this net that is cast and the fish that are part of that community will be gathered up and the good will be selected, but the bad will be cast out into the place of – weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It goes on and he tells more stories of a wedding banquet where folks are invited and they aren’t coming. Eventually they just invite whoever in, but some people come in but they don’t accept the wedding cloaks which are given to all the guests. They go, “I don’t need that. I’m good enough on my own.” That one will be rejected. One who is invited, brought in, given the opportunity but because they don’t receive what is given to them to use, they will be cast out into the place of – weeping and gnashing of teeth. Not a good pattern, folks.

Later in chapter 24 there is another story which talks about the servant who then ends up not treating their servants well. And when the person in charge finds out about this, that wicked servant is thrown out to the place of – weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now we have this story as well. In each of these, Matthew uses the phrase to clue into us that just because you are in the group, just because you show up, just because you might even be a leader within this community, if you’re not using what God has given to you, if you’re not living out your faith, if you’re not producing fruit from what you have been given to be a steward of, then there is a consequence to that and you will be cast out to the place of – weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I’m tell you right now this is a moment where I wish I wasn’t Presbyterian. I do, because the sermon on this, if I was a different denomination, ahh, so easy.

You think you're safe here in the faith, don't ya? Just because you showed up here, dressed up, lookin' all nice in your Sunday best and you're here in church. You think you've got salvation. You think you're on your way to heaven. Well, I got news for you. God's given you talents. I don't know 10, 5, 2, 1. I don't know how many. Maybe you've got 0.25 talents. It does not matter. You are called to use those and when you do not use those talents, there is no place for you.

It doesn't matter how many Sundays you came dressed in all your finery. It doesn't matter how much you said this or said that or wore that cross or put that bumper sticker on your car. I'm here to tell you today, if you're not using the talents that have been placed within you, that increases 20fold, 30fold what has been given to you, you will be in the place of the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. You will find yourself in the damnation that waits for those who lazily wait by for God to handle everything for you while you just sit all proper and pious.

Well, I'll tell you this right now. There is no place for you if you do not use what has been placed before you. That's the good news.

Oh, hey look, if you like that we could do that every week. The problem is that I come from a tradition that looks at the full extent of scripture, and I don't think that's the way to come into this. Now let's be honest though. Look, none of us really know exactly what the word of God is speaking to us. They could be right. We all better hope they're not right, but they could be right that your eternal salvation depends on how you use the gifts and abilities that have been given to you and the offering that you make in your life. They could be right.

What we believe though and I feel this stands on a firmer foundation of interpretation is that this is pointing towards the idea that you are meant to use what you have, but not out of fear. Not out of fear of an eternal damnation, but more out of fear of what you might not get to be part of in that moment. Because when we're given a life with such blessings and some of us abounding in blessings and talents and gifts and abilities and resources and some of us just given a small amount, but either way, each and every one of us is intended by God to use them. That is clear in scripture.

We can all agree on this, across denominations, is the idea that you are given the gifts and abilities and talents and blessings in your life and you are intended to use them. We all agree on that. But when we decide that we can't be bothered to

partition enough of our life to serve, to care, to love, to sacrifice, to be generous. When we don't do that, it's got to raise some questions.

Questions like, how much do you really love this God?

Do you really want to waste the price that was paid for you to be here?

Do you really want to miss out on the joy of being part of this?

And when you don't participate, it affects the people around you. And you might just say, "Yeah, but I just don't want to get into it. I like my life better the way it is"

Well I'm here to say that not participating has consequences, and the very source of joy that's offered to you by the ministry and mission that Christ calls us into, that joy of loving others and forgiving others and serving others and being sacrificial in our giving, you'll miss out on that and it's beautiful to be a part of that. It's nice to fill our lives with other things, but this is the stuff that's going to give you that joy that can't be taken away.

And it affects the people around you because when you don't participate, when you do not become an agent of light and love and grace and mercy and peace in this world, that means that the people around you have lost something. You're stealing from the experience of life of the people around you when you don't live out your faith. They could have the experience of having someone right there, who is a part of that light and part of that witness. And we each need that. We need that witness that we each bring to bear. The little bit of faith that you have, the little bit of talents you have, the little bit of blessings you have, even that is called forth to be invested into the ministry and mission that we've been called to do together.

Not participating has consequences and I think we each want that life that finds ourselves in community, in joy and in love. And I think it's worth our time. And I think it's worth our talents. And I think it's worth our treasures to show our gratitude and our praise.

May God be glorified by what you think about that.

Halleluiah and Amen.