

Being Apostolic

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[0:00] Amen. Speak to us and through us, thy mighty word, O Lord, in the name of the Father, and of the! Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Title of this sermon, Being Apostolic. Do you have any talents you want to share in this parish transition? Let's talk about that as we talk about today's gospel lesson, the parable of Jesus on the talents. So with this passage, we start with the two cons, context and content.

The context is that this is another one of the parables Jesus is using to talk about the second coming, about his return in the final days as king. And the question is, how do we invest our time, talent and treasure while we wait for him to return? The other thing we need to know in the context is what a talent is. In the old days, a talent was a unit of measure. And by the time the scriptures were written, when Jesus was walking the earth, a talent equaled a year's wages for a laborer. So as we look at today's world, let's say a laborer makes \$15 an hour, his or her yearly salary would be \$30,000. So by today's dollars, a talent equals \$30,000. So here's the parable from Jesus.

It appears that, as Jesus said, a rich person was going out on the trip. I don't know where he was going, Falkland Island, someplace far away. And he left his managers to invest his estate. So he said to the first manager, here's five talents. Take care of it while I'm gone.

So considering \$30,000 is one talent, that means \$150,000 he gave him to have responsibility for.

[2:22] That's a lot of money. And then the next manager, he gave \$60,000 to deal with. And the third manager, he gave \$30,000 to deal with. Well, the rich person went away. And maybe a year later or whenever, he came back. He got his managers in to give an accounting. He said to the first one, how have you done? And the first manager said, well, you gave me \$50,000 and I have made another \$50,000. That's not bad, is it? Would you like to make \$150,000 in a year? That's pretty darn good.

And so the rich person said, all right, you've been faithful in a little bit. I don't know if \$150,000 is a little bit, but for him it was. You've been faithful in a little bit. I'll give you responsibility for a lot. Enter my joy. And the second manager said, well, you gave me \$60,000, I've made another \$60,000. The owner said, well, good. All right, you come into my joy.

The third manager, however, looked at his boss and said, I know that you're an evil man, that you take what you haven't even planted. And so I put your money in the ground. Here it is, \$30,000 back. The owner was not happy with this approach. He probably wasn't happy with the compliment that the manager gave. He definitely was not happy with what the manager had done with that \$30,000.

He said, oh, you think that I'm nasty, are you? Well, you incompetent and lazy manager, you're out of here. You're fired. And he said, take the \$30,000 that he had and give it to the one who invested \$150,000. I don't know if that feels fair to you, but that's the way it was. Jesus didn't always give parables that make us feel good about everything. Now, that's the parable. Now, what do we do with it? What does it mean in God's scheme of things? Well, the fact of this parable is what Jesus is telling us. God does expect our faithful stewardship of all he's entrusted to our care. Whether that be a body, our body, our human body, we're expected to exercise faithful stewardship.

What do we take into our body? How do we exercise our body? How do we keep this body as healthy as we can? Stewardship over our families. How do we take responsibility for our families? How are we accountable to our families? And how do we build accountability system if we've got children?

[5:20] Our job. How do we exercise faithful stewardship that we can be honest people in our work? How do we deal if we're with a corporation that we know is dishonest? How do we exercise stewardship? Money. What do we do with our money? Do we use it constructively or destructively? And the same with our church. Are we drain on our church or are we building our church? And even

leisure. What about how we watch the tube or the internet? What are we watching? Is it constructive or destructive? Now we can squander it.

We can lose it. I think about that example when I was in eighth grade. I was a squad leader in our gym class and I wasn't very conscientious and one day the coach said, you are no longer the squad leader. Get in back. I'll pick somebody else. Well, I felt that was very unfair. But as I thought about it as the months went by, I realized that I had blown it myself. So what a thrill it was when I got in ninth grade and the coach looked at me and said, you are now squad leader again. I hope you learned something through this. And I did. I learned responsibility. But let me say, if you're feeling guilty regarding how you exercise stewardship over your family, your body, your job, your money, your church, even your leisure, welcome to the club. But don't despair. You can always repent and start again.

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. I don't know if you've ever watched the Father Brown Mysteries on British television. It's based on the writings of G.K. Chesterton, a great Christian writer. But in every episode, there comes a point where Father Brown says to the guilty party, all is not lost. God will forgive. You repent and let him know and make it right.

Well, that's wonderful because Jesus has invested everything in us. He offered a blood sacrifice. You know, a sacrifice is a ransom is what he offered us. A ransom is when someone steals someone and then offers the person back for a price. And that's what Jesus did for us. He paid the ransom in blood to move us from captivity to sinfulness to the freedom of heaven. And for us, that's called salvation by faith through the grace of God. He brings us back. He pays the ransom. He gives us freedom.

He sets the example for us that we might know how to invest in the lives of others. Which brings us to point three. How do we apply this parable? How do we invest our talent the way Jesus recommended that people in his day use their talent? Point three. Application. How do we move from impotent ministry to a worthwhile ministry?

[8:54] Would we bury our talents in the garden? Would we put them under a mattress? That's what that third inefficient manager did. How can we be effective stewards? And the key to this, Jesus showed us in the parable. You know that third manager. He had a flawed perception of his boss. What is your perception of God?

Is it positive or negative? That perception may make a difference in how you invest in your life. Is God a wonderful saving father to you? Or is he a harsh, disciplining God who hurts people?

You see, if we have the right perception, the biblical perception, as the God who loves us so much, he's willing to pay a blood ransom to save us from captivity to sin. Well, if we have that good perception, we can be like those first two servants. We can invest wisely. We can practice giving generously as we follow Jesus and his giving attitude. We can follow Christ's investment scheme. And we live that out by giving in our own parish, our time, our talent, our money, our active ministry. It's interesting how people give to the church in money. Some choose to look at it as if they were going to a movie.

[10:41] What does a movie cost? 10 or 12 dollars? All right, so I'll put 10 or 12 dollars in the offering plate. I'm going to be entertained and I pay for the entertainment. That's not a healthy way to give, but that's the way a lot of people give.

Some pay dues. In fact, I had a guy some years ago who obviously came out of a very secular background and said to me, what are the dues to be a member of this church? Well, I had to tell them that it's not about dues.

In the synagogues today, a lot of people have to pay dues, synagogue dues. In the church, we don't have synagogue dues. We don't have church dues. We don't need to look at it as what dues do I pay to stay here.

Some people pay fair share. Let's just say that the budget is \$78,000 and there are 30 individuals or families.

Divide 30 into \$78,000 and that's my fair share. That's what I'll pay. Well, that's getting close to where we want to be, but that's still not the best. The best, of course, is the tithe.

[12:01] In fact, we pay God a loving amount in token of the fact that all is His and He's given us stewardship over what we have.

With Mary Ellen and I, we first learned about the tithe when we were young people. In fact, I was 25 years old. I was a young Marine captain and we were in our first parish together as a couple.

In fact, someone asked me if I would be on the stewardship committee. Well, with my background, I had no idea what stewardship even meant, but I was asked to be on the committee, so I went on. At the time, I was a captain and the leader of the stewardship committee was a major. A captain in those days spoke to a major by saying, yes sir, no sir. And so, the major convened the meeting and he said, what we're going to do is set the example for the congregation. We're all going to tithe. I'm going to send the paper around.

Please sign it. We are 100% tithers. Well, the meeting got over and I went home. And Mary Ellen said, how was the meeting? I said, that was good. We all agreed that we're going to tithe. And she said, what does that mean? And I said, I haven't the slightest idea.

[13:27] So, she said, why don't you look it up in the dictionary? In those days, there was actually a book called a dictionary. So, I looked up under tithes. I found tithes. I read it and I read it through again. And she said, well, what does it mean?

I said, it means we're in a big load of trouble. Giving a tenth of our income? But, you know, being a brain-dead evangelical, I said, well, if it's in the Bible, I guess we'll do it.

So, we began to give a tenth of our income for God's mission. And as the years have gone by, you know, we're not great folks and we definitely have to deal with sin every week.

But the tithe has been a wonderful part of our life. It's expanded us to see God working through our gifts to Him. Giving generously. Here's a principle. Giving generously produces dynamic faith. Take a chance.

You know, last week I advised, gas up. Gas up through the Word and the sacrament. This week I advise, invest. Invest. Invest in your parish. Listen to others. Love them. Pray for them. Pray for this parish family.

[14:50] Invite them into your homes. Care for them. Launch out into the deep, congregation. Without it, we become that third manager.

Have you thought about this? You're the captain of a ship and you want to make sure that it never has any damage. What would you do? Never let it leave port.

And for some of us, that's what our faith is. We're afraid to launch out. God gives us the courage to launch out. So I would say to you, invest. Use your talents, as did the first two servants in today's Gospel.

Invest. Do you want to share your talent with Church of the Holy Trinity during this transition? Let's grow. Lord God, thank you for this chance to worship you, to speak your word, and to allow you to be our God. In Christ's name, amen.

Amen.