

## Daily Devotional Guide

**Monday** – Read Matthew 25:15. The master divided his talents among his servants based on their individual abilities. We have often heard the old phrase, “God never gives us more than we can handle.” People often make this statement when speaking of difficulty in life, implying that God somehow intentionally gives us trying circumstances. This is incorrect. The phrase applies to the resources and opportunities God gives to us. God knows what we are capable of; He created us. Are you investing the gifts God has given you?

**Tuesday** – Read Matthew 25:21. There is a process to Christian growth and discipleship. Many of us want to go right to the head of the class. However, we must develop faithfulness and grow our spiritual muscles. When we show that we can be responsible with a few things, God will bless us with more opportunities to serve Him. We must start where we are. How faithful are you with what you already have?

**Wednesday** – Read Matthew 25:24-28. You know why this servant was punished? He played it safe. When we follow Jesus, one thing is for sure – he will call us out of our comfort zone and ask us to take a risk for him. Why do we need God if we play it safe? Here is a good test to see if you are doing what God is asking you to do: Do you find yourself asking for God’s power to accomplish what He wants you to do? When we are desperate for God’s power to accomplish something, God has us right where He wants us.

**Thursday** – Read Matthew 25:29-30. These are difficult verses to swallow. What do they mean? Basically, Jesus is saying that those who show fruit of their faithfulness will receive more opportunities to bear fruit. But those who have nothing to show for what God has given them will find themselves at a loss. What do you have to show for the opportunities God has given you?

**Friday** – Take time today to pray for God to reveal to you how He wants you to serve our church. What gifts do you have which could be used for God’s glory through the ministries of the church? In what ways will you invest the talents God has given you?



### PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH

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## Pasadena Community Church

### Extravagant Giving

Sunday, October 30, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 25: 14 - 30

We all love a good comeback story, don't we? We all love to see an underdog beat the odds and win. That's the kind of stuff great movies and stories are made of. We love to see people come from behind and claim the victory. For example, don't we love it when the Rays beat the Yankees! There is something sweet about a team beating another team with twice the payroll. We love to root for the underdog.

It is for this reason that our scripture lesson is so disappointing. Jesus does it again – mystifying us with another strange parable on the Kingdom of God. And what makes this parable so disappointing? Well, the underdog in Jesus' story loses, and he loses big! What is worse is that his loss is rubbed into his face. He is humiliated. What exactly happened and what in the world is Jesus trying to tell through a story about an underdog who gets creamed?

Well, as Matthew records this parable, Jesus said there was a man of some substance who was leaving his big estate for a long trip. He decided that his interests would be best served if he put his resources in control of some of his assistants. He gave one of them 5 thousand dollars, another two, and a third, the underdog, one. Pay attention to the underdog.

When the wealthy man returned from his long trip he took the three of them to lunch to find out what they did with his money. The one who had received five grand spoke up first and said that he had doubled the investment; he now had 10 grand. The one with 2 doubled it

to 4. The boss praises them for what they did. These are the kind of people you want handling your money, especially in our economy!

Then there was the underdog sitting sheepishly at the table. We had hoped to hear that he quadrupled the money, but that was not the case. The underdog who received one grand had no self-confidence at all and he feared his boss. He knew that he was a hard man who insisted a good return on every investment. He thought, “What if I invested in something that failed? Or what if I put the money in the bank and it collapsed? What if when my boss returns I could only give him back half of his money?”

So, the underdog did the safe thing: He buried the money into the ground. He played it safe, and felt good about it. In fact, he may have been proud of himself. This way he would not lose anything. The boss would come back and ask for his money, and he would say, “Here it is! Every cent! Nothing has been lost. Aren't I responsible?”

You have to appreciate a person like this. He is the person who always plays it safe. He is the person who is committed to being conservative. He is the average student who picks an easy subject to report on instead of risking getting a bad grade on a tougher subject. He is the person who chooses to remain on first base instead of risking an out by trying to steal second. He is not a bad person. In fact, many would respect him for his safe way of living.

According to Jesus, this underdog didn't get any respect at all. As soon as he told his boss that he buried his money into the ground his boss replied: "You wicked, lazy servant. You are right that I am a tough operator. If you knew, then why didn't you act accordingly?" Then his boss took the money from him and gave it to the man who had ten thousand dollars, and then he commanded, "Throw this worthless servant out into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like that?

Wow! That is harsh – a very harsh punishment for playing it safe? This parable ends in tragedy. Why in the world would Jesus tell us such a tragic story?

I recall a man coming to see when I was serving in Lakeland. He was retired and told me that he had to find something to do because he was driving his wife crazy. We talked about some ministries he would be interested in and I put him to work. It wasn't long before he set up another appointment with me. Some tears began to fall down his face. I asked, "What's wrong?" He replied, "It's what I am doing for the church." I said, "Oh no. Did we put you in the wrong place?" He said, "No, that is just it. For the first time in my life I am in the right place. I don't know what took me so long to get here. All my life I have played it safe with everything I had. I am now learning that everything important in life is meant to be given away."

This is really what this parable is about. We really don't want to say it. We really don't want to admit it, but the villain of our parable for today is a timid man who played it safe with the valuable things he had been given. It really is tough to take because so many of us feel sorry for him, can empathize with him, can relate to him. After all, was securing the money by burying it so wrong? He wanted to protect his boss's assets! What's wrong with that?

If we take this parable seriously it seems that Jesus does not have much patience with those who don't take risks. For Jesus, there is

no room in the Kingdom of God for timidity. There is no room in the Kingdom of God for fear. There is no room in the Kingdom of God for playing it safe. If there is one thing this parable tells us it is the Kingdom of God is not for sissies!

Sure, in the world, it is virtuous to play things cool. In the world, risk truly is a dirty word. In the world, you hold on to everything you've got because you never know when you will need it. In the world, you don't rush into anything. You make a conservative plan. In the world you hold something back. In the world, you don't overdo it. In the world, you need to be sensible.

However, these values are not welcome in the Kingdom of God. Jesus tells us this over and over again in his teachings, but we like to play them down. We like to play them safe. We like to sugar coat them and explain them away. But, if we are honest, we know that what Jesus calls us to be as Kingdom people is dangerous and risky.

We worship a Savior who says, "Deny yourself, take up a cross and follow me." We worship a Savior who says, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you." We worship a Savior who says, "Go and make disciples!" We worship a Savior who says, "Go into this world of hate and change it with my love!" We worship a Savior who was murdered for the things he said and did! All of this is risky business!

Living in the Kingdom means risking everything you have been given for the sake of the gospel of Christ. This parable is clear. Christ is not looking for people and churches who always play it safe. He questions those who always pray for comfort, ease and security. When did we fool ourselves into believing that being a Christian means life becomes easier? I don't see that idea anywhere in the gospels. More exciting? Oh yeah! More meaningful? Oh yeah! More fulfilling? Oh yeah? Easier? No!

Here Jesus comes. He is starting his revolutionary ministry. He approaches these

rough and tattered fishermen – Peter, Andrew, James and John. They are just minding their own business, making a buck. Life is going at a good pace. Then this strange carpenter from Nazareth says to them, "You were made for more than this. Drop your nets. I am going to make you fish for people! You are going to help me transform the world!" And what did they do? They did the most risky thing. They left everything and followed Jesus. They left the ordinary in order to do the extraordinary. They said goodbye to safety and mediocrity and said hello to God's mission. They could not resist the pull of ultimate meaning, purpose and adventure. Sure, it was scary, risky, but they were willing to take the risk in order to be more than just average people living an average life with average goals. That is the pull of the Kingdom!

Jesus of Nazareth walks into each of our lives today and tempts us with the impossible. "You want adventure? Follow me. You want challenge? Follow me. You want excitement? Follow me. You want to fulfill your destiny? Follow me. You want to experience transformation in yourself and others? Follow me. Follow me into the high risk life of world changing, hate breaking, sin binding, love finding ministry!"

This is Jesus' call for our church. If there is one thing I know it is I don't want Pasadena to be an average church. I never want us doing half baked ministry, just being a religious shop. And you want to know the key to being an extraordinary church for the Kingdom? The key is being so risky, so extravagant, so lofty with our dreams and visions that we are forced to trust in God in order to do ministry.

Who needs God if we are playing it safe? Who needs God if it is business as usual? Who needs God if we can do mediocre ministry on our own? This is why this parable shakes us up – who needs God if we bury our life in the ground? Why do we need God if we play it safe? Here is a good test to see if you are doing what God is asking you to do: Do you find yourself asking for God's power to

accomplish what He wants you to do? When we are desperate for God's power to accomplish something, God has us right where He wants us.

There will come a day when the Kingdom of God is fully established and the King of Kings will ask each of us, "I gave you the gift of the church. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of ministry? What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of education. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of children. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of teaching and preaching. What did you do with it? I gave you the gift of life. What did you do with it?" What do we have to show for the opportunities God has given us?

When Bishop Will Willimon was the minister at Duke Chapel he received a phone call from a very upset parent. The father was upset because his graduate school bound daughter had just told him she was going to 'throw it all away', as he put it, and go and do mission work in Haiti.

The father said, "This is up surd. She has a degree in mechanical engineering from Duke and she's going to dig ditches in Haiti. I hold you personally responsible for this."

Willimon replied, "Me? What have I done?" Father said, "Well, you filled her head with all that religious stuff. She thinks a lot of you. That's why she's doing this foolishness."

Willimon replied, "Now look, mister. Hold on. Didn't you have her baptized as a kid? Didn't you read her Bible stories and take her to Sunday school? Didn't you let her go on all those youth retreats and ski trips?"

The father said, "Well, yes..."

Willimon said, "Then it's *your* fault she believed all that stuff. Not mine. *You're* the one that introduced her to Jesus, not me."

The father replied, "But we never expected it to come to this. We never dreamed she would go to Haiti. We just wanted her to grow up to be a good Methodist."

Let those who have ears to hear, hear. Amen.