

- After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Matt 25: 14-30 “**Abundant Possibilities**” (11/13/2011)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

You know the text. It is a famous one. After we read the text together let us again see which kind of opinions we have among us, what this text might describe. The Parable of the Talents is bequeathed to us in a Lukas and a Matthew version. Today we read together from the gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, the verses 14-30:

14 ‘For it is as if a man, **going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them;** ¹⁵ to one he gave **five** talents, to another **two**, to another **one**, **to each according to his ability.** **Then he went away.**

A) ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. (100% profit)

B) ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. (100% profit)

C) ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

To A) ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then 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.” ²¹His 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.”

To B) ²²And 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.” ²³His 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.”

To C) ²⁴Then 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; ²⁵so **I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.**” ²⁶But 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? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So 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. ³⁰*As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” AMEN ...

So: What do you think this Parable speaks about? ...

Jesus' parables have several layers. All of them can be read differently in different times and contexts. You can read it as a parable about money and interpret [inter-pret] it in favor of a market economy. Or you remember that we celebrate today also Stewardship Sunday and expect now the minister to preach about the gifts we all have, which God's asks us to share. All these approaches show different layers of this parable. I think they all are right, but I also think that our story goes even deeper.

To figure out Jesus' intention why he told this story it helps to look at the context. Already the location of the parable gives us a hint; it appears in chapter 25 of the Matthew gospel – and the gospel has only 28. Already in the next chapter Jesus gets arrested and afterwards crucified. Our chapter 25 bridges into this last part of Jesus life. Three parables content our chapter 25. The third parable we will hear next Sunday. Our parable is the second one. If we wouldn't have had last Sunday Global Mission Sunday we would have heard the first one – the parable of the 10 bridesmaids: The five foolish ones forgot to bring enough oil for their lamps while waiting for the bridegroom in the night. The 5 smart bridesmaids refused to share their supply, as it would have been not enough for all. When the bridegroom arrived the 5 foolish ones were gone to get new oil; when they returned they were not allowed to join the wedding.

All three of our parables in this chapter content Jesus' heritage for us. They content what Jesus would like to leave for us.

The parable of the bridesmaids asks us to be alert – the return of the One can happen any time. The warning for us: Don't miss the point – don't get distracted by others or your own laziness from the real important things in life, for example the values you believe in as perso of faith.

OUR parable talks also about the consequences of our acting. While the first two slaves earn more responsibilities and joy, gets the third one thrown into the darkness, where he finds “weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

But it is not only about the consequences of our acting. It is also about the inner coherence between the people who act. The ideal relationship between people we call justice. The master in Jesus parable didn't give everybody the same; he gave the first slave 5 talents, the second slave 2 and the third slave only 1 talent. But doesn't seem this pretty unfair? No, we simply need to read our text carefully; it says: “to each according to his ability”. What is good for one person, doesn't need to be good in any case for the other one. We are different. We have different needs and abilities, different educational and cultural backgrounds. Some of us are born to survive in a competitive environment, others not. God has made us all so

diverse as the colors of the rainbow.

I am curious: What was expected from the last slave? He obviously failed in the eyes of his master. I picture him after he received the ruinous judgment sitting frustrated in bar, over more than one drink. With him at the bar sits one of the 5 foolish bridesmaids.

She: Hi, loser!

He: Hi, loser!

She: “Na, what happen to u?

He: I tried to make it right. My boss is very harsh. You never can make it right. He asked me to take care about his business. I thought I am smart, if I don't do anything specific, but just go on with what we used to do in the firm all the time.

She: You wanted to be on the safe side ...

He: We always did it this way. We never did it different. I thought I do the right thing ...

She: I know what you are talking about ...

He: What ever you do is wrong...

She: Come on, I buy you another drink What do you think your bastard of boss wanted you to do?

He: I am a technician at a power plant. My boss is one of the big

shareholders. He said that our customers expect that we work energy efficient as our oil reserves will come to an end in latest 50 years. He said it would have been my damned job to do something to protect God's creation by using my brain and develop new and more energy saving ways.

Pause. Then...

She: Get it. God asks us to take on responsibility for her creation and you were afraid. Or even worse: We need to change from short-term profit and comfort to sustainability as value. But you didn't lead the process into the future, you didn't change and refused this way to lead according God's call.

Pause. Then ...

He: You talk big! Didn't u belong to the chickens, who were more interested in looking for hand-bags and shoes in the shop-windows in the city than to expect the bridegroom? In the end you stood stupid in front of a closed door and the party went on without you! ...

Pause. Then...

She: Yes, u r right! We were stupid! But I don't want to wait the whole time. I want to have life and fun!

He: Ach so, life and fun! Little partygirl, he? ... If you would be mum and would have some more life experience, u would know that your life and fun has its end where the future of your own child is touched! Yes, I was too afraid to speak up to change the policy of my

company. But you were just interested in yourself and had simply no antenna for the needs of the whole society. You belonged to your social girly club and were not really interested in what was going on in the lives of others around you.

She: I don't think that it makes much sense to point with fingers on each other. If u r such a great Christian stop it! You obviously have to learn that money and profit should serve first and foremost God. And I might need to learn that the world is more than just me and that God's call for me might be bigger and more exciting than I think.

He: You might be right: God asks us always to put ourselves in relationship to others, asking us, where and how we can use our gifts best likewise for the ensemble and us. Let us learn out of our mistakes! Next time we will do it better. Cheers, sister!

Both: CHEERS!

God is a God of relationship. A healthy relationship only can happen when we are clear about ourselves. As person, but also as church we only can grow when mission and spirituality comes together. The filling out of checks is charity, the courage to step into relationships social justice. Both are necessary, but only on the social justice level we get really challenged and can be church. Church is to reach out to the people of the Occupy Movement, especially when you not agree with them, to bring them food (why not soup?) and clothing, but then to ask: Why do you do this? ... In the moment in which we do not

judge each other, but open up to each other we are church. ... We are church when we not only fill out checks to the people in Honduras and El Salvador, but visit them in Mission Trips, which are nothing else than Trips of Encounters with people in other circumstances, maybe other cultures, maybe of other social classes. When we allow other people to touch us – then we are church. Because this is what God asks us to be: To be vulnerable for the needs of others: So that we become merciful in our hearts – to others and ourselves.

You ask how we can do it?

One day a young monk came to Abba Joseph and asked him what more he could do, since he was already doing some fasting, and some praying, and some work, mostly weaving [wiefing] baskets. The holy man responded, the story goes, by raising his hands, and fire shot out from his fingers as he responded to the young man with this great challenge: "Why not become totally fire?" □ □

The story stirs our spirits. Are we going along, doing some fasting and praying and basket-weaving, but not catching fire? Is our faith life more about safety and reassurance and security? Are we willing to let the gospel loose in the world? Are we willing to be a blessing to the world by doing the step from charity into real relationships, learning from one other as equals at eye level about ourselves and the world, which God asks us to reign?

Now you might know why God has brought you this morning into this church. To start a new life and the adventure to meet the people of the world face to face. You are welcome here! AMEN