

*“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. 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.’ 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.’ 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. 29For 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. 30As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

The plates are passed from person to person - from one row to the next. Everyone here is given the opportunity to reach into pocket or purse and make an offering. Hand grasps the gift - then opens to release. What is in your heart at that moment?

One remembers a father who taught tithing. Ten percent of what you get is what you give. Every time the hand releases an offering a responsibility is fulfilled.

For another, this is a moment to not look out of place. An offering is expected, so she puts a little in the envelope so she will look like all the rest as the plate is passed.

The next one in the pew is paying his dues - like paying for the tickets to a ball game or for the membership to the health club. When his hand releases the envelope he has given what he thinks he owes for the morning’s service.

Back a few rows is the one who hears every harsh word in scripture. She sees God's demanding, never satisfied gaze as she sacrifices to give more to this God who always wants more.

Beside her is another whose best friends are here. She gives because this is a home for her, she wants this place to be as beautiful as her own home and filled with people who are working together.

Across the aisle is the man who feels responsible for this church. He's on the council, his ideas are shaping the programs of the church. His offering will make it happen. When his hand releases the gift there is a quiet pride in his heart.

Three pews back is another whose offering has been decreased. He is unhappy; he will use this envelope to send a message. He'll get them where it hurts.

How do I know what is in all of these hearts? The truth is I have only been telling you about some of the things that have been in my heart. I have been each of these people at one time or many times when my hand has released an offering. I am assuming you are not so different than I.

I am assuming that when this sermon is done today that you still will be giving for a whole variety of reasons, some that I have mentioned, some that I have missed. But as you consider the parable of the talents in this morning's gospel reading, I hope that you will think about your giving in a different light.

"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."

The story is about you and Jesus. He has entrusted all that he has with you until he returns. But in the parable no instructions are given. He entrusted his property to them. That's it.

Now they did not all get the same – each received according to his ability. The one with five talents went off at once and traded with them. He was raring to go. He did not need any sermons to encourage him. He did not meekly inquire what he should do next. He just grabbed the money as an opportunity and never looked back. He was like the player who says, "Give me the ball coach – I'll make it happen."

And the second was like the first – with two talents he made two talents more.

But the one given one talent dug a hole in the ground and buried the money until his master would return.

After a long time – and we might well read that as at the end of the world – the master – we might read Jesus – returned.

For the ones who grabbed the ball and ran Jesus has nothing but praise. The ones with five talents who made five talents more and the one with two talents who doubled them are told: Good job – let's celebrate!

But the one given one talent came before his master with these words: “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, so I was afraid. I went and hid your talent in the ground.”

And the master who hasn't seemed the least bit harsh up to this point becomes very harsh with the fearful slave. “Throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

So what does the parable mean? Take a chance – go for it! Trust God to be gracious!

But beware of fear. The man's fear and dread of the master was an insult. The master was angered by it.

Fear looks like this: If I give a gift will I have enough for myself. If I give a lot my neighbor may have more than I.

And fear looks like this: If I don't give enough God will punish me.

God hates our fearful clutching, brooding, worrying. God loves our trusting in God.

God loves a cheerful giver the scriptures teach. Trust in God and you will be one. Trusting in God you may find giving to be fun.

And if not, don't brood about it. Think about Jesus and his love for you. Constantly remind yourself of how Jesus went to the cross for you. Morning, noon, and night feed yourself with God's word. God will figure out the rest.