

SERMON: DON'T HIDE YOUR TALENTS-FIND AND SHARE IT!

(Matthew 25:14-30 Preached at MPC on November 19th, 2017)

"O how the mighty are fallen." Most of us have heard that saying. It comes from the Bible. "O how the mighty are fallen" is part of David's lament over the death of King Saul and Saul's son, Jonathan. Saul had been the king—the Lord's anointed. Jonathan had been David's best friend. The two of them were killed in battle. David grieved over the death of the king—but he especially grieved over the death of his friend Jonathan. "O how the mighty are fallen," he cried (2 Samuel 1:19 ff.). We can hear the grief in his voice.

"O how the mighty are fallen." We're familiar with the phrase, because we hear it so often. Someone in Hollywood or in Washington becomes the center of the news media especially right now with all the public scrutiny about inappropriate sexual behavior and harassment of women in the work place.

"O how the mighty are fallen." Some years ago, an airline stewardess asked Muhammad Ali to buckle his seatbelt. Ali said, "Superman don't need no seat belt." The stewardess said, "Superman don't need no airplane, either." Ali fastened his seat belt.

But in our story today, the problem isn't the mighty falling—it's the lowly ordinary person like you and me. So, let me rephrase "O how the mighty are fallen" with "Oh how the LOWLY are fallen."

Jesus talks about a rich man who went on a journey. He gave five talents to one servant--two talents to another—and one talent to the third. The talent that Jesus was talking about wasn't a special ability, like a talent for music or football. In Jesus' day, a talent was an amount of money—a large sum of money. If Jesus were telling the story today, he would say that one man got five million dollars--and another two million--and a third one million. The master left his money with the three men and then went on a journey.

When the master returned, he found that the man with five million had worked hard and doubled his money. Likewise, the man with the two million. But the man with one million had just buried his money for safekeeping. He didn't even take it to the bank to open a savings account or to a credit union to find out about a money account—nothing!

The master took delight in the work of the man with five million, and gave him a promotion. Likewise, the man with two million. But he was NOT pleased with the third man. He said: "You wicked and slothful servant. You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest" (vv. 26-27). So, he took the money from that servant and gave it to the other two--and he had that servant cast into outer darkness, "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 30).

"Oh how the lowly are fallen." This is an unusual story. A highly regarded biblical scholar Frederick Dale Bruner has this to say about it: "In almost every other parable in the Gospel, PRIDE of some sort is attacked. But this parable is unique in attacking what seems like HUMILITY.

But it isn't really humility that Jesus is attacking here—not genuine humility. What Jesus is attacking is something quite different: He is attacking the kind of attitude that says, "I'm afraid, so I'll just hide out." Jesus is attacking the kind of attitude that says, "I can't do much, so I won't do anything."

He is attacking the mindset that says, "I'm not going to worry about the other person so I'll just take care of myself." As you might have guessed, Jesus didn't tell this story just to be telling a story. This was really a story about his going on a journey—his ascending into heaven after his resurrection and leaving the world in our hands—leaving the responsibility of planting the Gospel in our hands—leaving the future of the Body of Christ, the church in our hands.

The big question for us as disciples and members of the Body of Christ is whether we will be faithful to work for Christ while waiting for him to return again. Jesus told this parable to let us know that he will reward the faithful when he returns, and to warn us that he will punish the unfaithful—the fearful or lazy servants.

The danger is that we will be tempted to say, "I'm just an ordinary person. I don't have much money. I don't have any special talent. I have to work hard just to keep the bill collectors from the door—so I can't be expected to do much for God, or for anyone else."

But Jesus gave this parable to say that he expects each of us to do our part for the

kingdom of God—whether we are a five, two, or a one-talent person. The truth is that most good work is done by one-talent people. If all the one-talent people stopped working, we would all starve. Five-talent people do lots of good too sometimes, but not without the support of one-talent people.

And the truth is that most of us are one-talent people. An event that sticks out in my mind is the memory of a high-school awards ceremony that I attended nearly fifty years when our 1966 class gathered last June of 2016 for our 50th class reunion. As I recall, certain members of my class crowded into the auditorium that graduation day, and teachers called out by name those few who received awards for scholarships, athletics, citizenship, and appointments to one of the three military academies in the US. Most of the kids in that auditorium received no awards.

But I especially remember one boy who received award after award after award. He was an athlete, a scholar, a good citizen, and a handsome young man. He was our five-talent man—the valedictorian we called him. I was a little jealous of course but a bit awestruck too. I thought at that moment what it would be like to walk in his shoes. I wondered if he understood how fortunate he was and if he would live up to the potential everyone saw in him on that day.

Right near the end of the ceremony I was pleasantly surprised when they called my name and announced I was best music student of promise and received a small music grant of \$100 to the school of my choice. Wow I thought that was something great. In that assembly that day, there was one five-talent kid and a couple dozen two-talent kids and one hundred one-talent kids like me.

The five-talent boy could have turned out to be the next Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, or Warren Buffet—He probably accomplished more than any one of us, but there were so many one-talent kids. I am sure that some of the one-talent kids blossomed and did some good things—possibly even great things. I am also confident that the collective efforts of the one-talent kids amounted to a great deal—almost certainly more than the efforts of the five-talent kid.

My point of this illustration is related to the point of our parable. God has endowed each of one of us with a gift, a talent for something—And it's so important for each of us to use our something. Martin Luther captured something of the significance of the one-

talent person when he said: "A dairymaid can milk cows to the glory of God."

What he meant, of course, was that even the most ordinary person has blessings to offer. In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus warned us that he will hold us accountable for our stewardship of the blessings that he has given to us. He will hold us accountable, because our one-talent blessing is important—our one talent can make a real difference. Friends we can't hide our talents—we've got to find and share it!

One of my favorite stories about a one-talent person has to do with Mother Teresa, who was speaking in a Minneapolis church. After she spoke, a woman in a wheelchair raised her hand to ask a question. The woman spoke with great difficulty, because she suffered from cerebral palsy—but eventually it became clear that she was asking what she and those like her could do for others. Mother Teresa hesitated not at all. She said: "You can do the most. You can do more than any of us because your suffering is united with the suffering of Christ on the cross—and it brings strength to all of us."

"You can do the most." Does anyone here believe that? I do! The woman in a wheelchair joined a group called The Sick and Suffering Co-Workers of Mother Teresa. She said, "We are fortunate to have a share in Christ's cross." She also prayed: "Lord, let us suffer without regret, for in your will and in our gracious acceptance of that same holy will, lives our eternal destiny."

That woman lived for a year after she met Mother Teresa. During that year she bore witness to her faith—a witness that few of us will ever match. This ONE-talent woman—most would have considered her a NO-talent woman was able by the grace of God to give a FIVE-talent witness during that year. Her witness continues even today, years after her death, in the re-telling of her story. "What can I do?" she asked. "You can do the most!" was the answer given by Mother and that was true.

We give a blessing back to God whenever we use what God has given us to bless others. This is especially important today on pledge Sunday. Your pledges not only support the financial life and functionality of Christ's church at MPCA, but more importantly, your pledge is a direct expression of your faith commitment and promise to use the talents God has already given you—this is between you and God!

And we know God's blessings are circular—so whatever goes around comes around—we receive blessings in return for the blessings that we give. All of us have the potential for blessing others. We all have the potential for making the love of Christ known through the love that we show others. We all have the potential for bearing witness to what Jesus can do in our lives—we all have the potential for drawing others to Christ.

Here's a cute story about stewardship bumper stickers to lighten our request to give back to God today! Oh God, the bumper sticker says smile if you love Jesus; so I smiled all day and people thought I worked for Jimmy Carter. The bumper sticker said honk if you love Jesus; so I honked and honked and a policeman gave me a ticket for disturbing the peace in a hospital zone. The bumper sticker said wave if you love Jesus; so I waved with both hands, lost control of the car and crashed into the back of a Baptist bus. Oh, God, If I cannot smile, or honk, or wave, how will Jesus know I love him? Friends if you love Jesus, tithe—smiling, waving, or honking is too easy!

On a serious note, most of you have received a personal from both myself and John Toillion our treasurer. In John's letter, he mentioned we are running about 10% below what was pledged and projected—as of September 30, this amounts to \$12,295. The main goal for us as a congregation as we approach 2018 is to pay our own way, as the current giving does not cover the salaries of yours truly or our office staff.

We all need to understand our preschool, since its inception in 1970, is not a separate entity from MPC and as such, continues to be our largest mission outreach program to our community. It is our largest source of revenue but much of that goes to cover the preschool's significant operating and personnel expenses, with the remainder helping to offset the shortages and decrease in our church giving.

The point is if our giving doesn't increase in 2018, we will be limited in becoming the purpose driven healthy church Christ expects us to be—limited in our move forward to upgrade our facilities and sanctuary space—limited to how much we can sustain our general funding and also limited on how much we can pay down on our outstanding mortgage and building fund.

In my letter on stewardship, I mentioned four Biblical principles of giving of our time, talent, and resources based on God's ownership, our responsibility and accountability to God, and our rewards from God. As Christians in the 21st century, we need to embrace

this larger biblical view of stewardship—we need to think beyond our church budgets, building projects, mission outreach though important, to connect everything we do with what God is doing in the world. Friends, we don't need to hide our talents—we need to discover, use, and share them—we need to make that faith promise today—to be the faithful stewards with all that God has given us, within the opportunities presented through his providence to glorify Him, to serve the common good, and expand His Kingdom with purpose. Amen!