

“Visualizing God’s Grace”

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Today’s gospel lesson is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 25, verses 14 through 30. I’ll be reading from Eugene Peterson’s translation *The Message*.

“It’s also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master’s investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master’s money.

“After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: ‘Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.’ “The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master’s investment. His master commended him: ‘Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.’

“The servant given one thousand said, ‘Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.’

“The master was furious. ‘That’s a terrible way to live! It’s criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the

bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest. “Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this “play-it-safe” who won’t go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.’

This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray. Loving God, move within us today as we draw close to you. Open our hearts wide to the love you pour down on us. Open your eyes and stir our emotions to the reality about who we are as your loved children. Help us remember that we’re dearly loved for who we are right now; this very moment. Let’s remember, we’re profoundly called and equipped by God. May God increase our influence and anoint our words, so that each day we pray to be able to touch another persons’ heart to know the love of God. Amen.

Isaac Watts was an English Christian hymn writer in the late 17 and early 18th century. He was a theologian and productive and popular hymn writer. Isaac said that “One of life’s most difficult tasks is learning to trust.” Trust—it requires faith. Faith—it requires us to make decisions based on just a little information. It can be scary. It feels risky. Yet, that’s what God requires us to do in our faith journey.

Trust, faithfulness, and risk are three things this parable is about. It’s also about faith and adventure. The first thing we see happening in the story is an action of risk. A master leaves town to go on a journey. He gives three servants different amounts of money according to their abilities. To one servant he gives a thousand dollars, to another two, and to another five. The master is taking a risk on these servants, so he *must* have trust in them. He hands over the money to them and doesn’t add any instruction with it.

Finally the master returns home and gets the scoop on what’s been done with his wealth. Now remember, the master didn’t give any instructions about the use of

his wealth. He just handed over the money and left. Here's the scoop. Two of the servants doubled his money. One did nothing with it at all—that servant wanted to keep things in his life exactly as they were. He didn't want to risk anything. He didn't want to step outside of his comfort zone. He wouldn't even try. When the master approached him, this is what he said.

“I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.” This servant has trust issues. He said he was afraid to do *anything*. It would've been better for him to try than to not try at all. You've heard people say this. “I don't have any money to give.” It's not about the amount friends; it's about your trust in your Master to use what's been given to you.

This servant also said his master was harsh and demanded the best and makes no allowances for error. Well I don't understand that statement at all. The master said this to the servant. “If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least?” The servant figured what would be the least amount of risk. He did NOTHING. Fear was this servant's barrier. His trust of his master was zero, and consequently he made no profit—that was zero too.

As I read through the parable I wondered what the master's response would've been if the other two servants wouldn't have made a profit. Listen again to what the master said to the two servants who did something. “Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.”

The master doesn't compliment and praise them for doubling their money; he praises and accepts them for their trust and faithfulness. What he commends is not the amount of profit they make, but their willingness to try. They ventured out into the unknown and did things differently. No doubt they were a little scared

because they were taking a risk, but they had confidence. The master gave them both the same commendation. The fearful servant was controlled by fear. The other two servants were not. What's going on here?

I think what happened to the fearful servant happens to us more than we realize in our own lives. Maybe we base our perceptions of an authority figure from a bad experience we've had earlier in our lives. We've been so deeply hurt we struggle with trust. It thwarts our response to God. It places barriers along our path and keeps us from drawing closer to God. We're so afraid of making a mistake we do nothing. We freeze. We don't take any risk, and our faith remains undeveloped. We like the status quo. It's comfortable.

Now let's turn to a similar way to look at this passage that meets us where we're at today in our church. We've made progress here—we're giving more to mission and our children and teen groups are growing. New members are joining forces with us in an effort to advance the kingdom in our community. We've made some good improvements in our building, and we're adding to our numbers.

Now let me ask you a question. Do you think we've managed these successes because of our ingenuity? Or do you think it's because we place ourselves in God's hands? Servants must have a willingness to trust their Master. If they do their own thing and continue as they always have nothing will happen. No risk taken, no faith grown. What continues is nothing but the status quo.

Now imagine and visualize this. Imagine a God who is so faithful, so gracious, and so kind. We don't have to be worried if we fail when we trust God. We just do our best. We work hard. We include God in our financial decisions that grow our faith and reach people for Jesus Christ. Faith—it's an adventure, and if you don't step out of your comfort zone you're probably staying in your status quo.

If God leads us to seize an opportunity to advance the kingdom in our community we do it—because we trust God—and we believe we’re being led.

Imagine and visualize a God who encourages us to take a risk. Then it doesn’t turn out like we thought, yet we see God at work on our behalf. We imagine and visualize a God who doesn’t let us feel the depth of our misguided choices, and we prosper despite our imperfect ways. Imagine what it would be like to trust God more completely for your financial decisions and for the decisions of your church. Decisions that will empower us to reach more people with the love of Jesus Christ—bottom line is this—nothing ventured nothing lost.

Let’s imagine and visualize a God who is so full of grace, that when we act in faith and step out in trust we’re always held in the palm of a hand that never ever lets us fall. Let’s pray. Loving God full of grace who has trust in his servants, move in us to have more confidence in you and to use all you’ve given us. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.