

The Stewardship of Talents

Sirach 10:28-31; 1 Corinthians 12:4-12; Matthew 25:14-30

Stewardship begins with a simple but life-changing truth: all that we have, and all that we are, is a gift from God. Our time, our possessions, our abilities, even our very lives, have been entrusted to us by a generous Creator.

Last week we reflected on the stewardship of time. Today we turn to the stewardship of talents.

At the heart of today's Gospel is a simple but searching question: What are we doing with what God has entrusted to us? Are we using our gifts for God's purposes? Or have fear, self-doubt, or uncertainty led us to keep them hidden?

Jesus tells a story about three servants entrusted with something precious. Two receive what they have been given and use it boldly. One allows fear to take hold and buries his gift in the ground. The issue isn't how much each servant receives. The issue is what each servant does with what has been entrusted to them.

The word *talent* in the parable refers to a large sum of money. But because of this story, the word has also come to mean our abilities, skills, experience, and gifts. And so this parable invites each of us to reflect on the gifts God has placed in our hands and the responsibility that comes with them.

The master goes away, leaving the servants to care for what he has entrusted to them. He gives no detailed instructions; he simply trusts them to act. The servant with five talents trades with them and makes five more; the one with two makes two more. Both invest energy and effort, accepting the risk that they might lose what they have. The third servant buries his one talent. When the master returns, he hands back exactly what he received. He has risked nothing, attempted nothing, and gained nothing.

His failure is not that he had less than the others, but that fear kept him from using what he had. He refuses the stewardship placed in his hands.

Signs of God's generosity are all around us, not least in the talents given to each of us. A talent may be an aptitude, a skill, an experience, or an ability through which we can bring life to others. *Every* person has such gifts. An old tradition says that God sends each person into the world with a special message to deliver, a special song to sing, and a special act of love to offer. No one else can speak my message, sing my song, or offer my act of love. These are entrusted to me alone.

When we live out of our giftedness and use our talents fully, we come alive. We experience what Jesus called abundant life, life in all its fullness. We become more fully the people God created us to be and find ourselves working with God and sharing in God's mission. Instead of doing only what we think we ought to do, which can leave us depleted, we begin to do what we are called to do. Then we become more alive, the church is enriched, and others encounter God more fully through us.

Scripture also speaks of spiritual gifts. The phrase may sound rather otherworldly, but many of us exercise such gifts without ever using that label. Spiritual gifts are abilities given by the Holy Spirit for the service of others. As Paul writes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Scripture names many such gifts: healing and practical help, administration and teaching, pastoral care and encouragement in faith. God gives gifts to each of us to strengthen the church and make Christ known in the world.

If God distributes gifts throughout the body of Christ, then recognising those gifts becomes part of our responsibility to one another. Our talents and gifts need to be recognised and affirmed. Each of us has been entrusted with something through which God can bless others.

Yet in every faith community where I've ministered, I've heard people say, "I'm really not that gifted." Perhaps you've said, or at least thought, the same. But the challenge isn't to acquire a whole new set of talents or ask God for different gifts. It's to recognise what we already have. I suspect we've barely begun to discover the giftedness that exists within this faith community.

We can help one another by naming and affirming the gifts we see. This isn't mere flattery. It's a way of recognising how God gives to us through one another. If we are to grow into our gifts and risk using them, we need others to help us see them.

Many gifts lie dormant because no one encourages us to use them. And using them can be risky. We may fail, look foolish, face rejection, or compare ourselves with others and decide we don't measure up. Such fears tempt us to imitate the third servant and bury our talent. The tragedy of that servant wasn't simply that he did nothing; it was that fear kept him from becoming who he was and from using what God had given him.

Of course, we can also overestimate our talents or imagine ourselves suited to something when our gifts might be better used elsewhere. Recognising this doesn't deny our giftedness; it helps us discern where our gifts can best serve. That is why we need trusted relationships in which honest and caring feedback can be given and received. We can begin simply by telling someone what they have done well, and being specific: "I appreciated the way you did that because ..." rather than merely, "I liked what you did."

Sometimes the obstacle isn't fear of failure but fear of stepping into the fullness of who God created us to be. Our deepest fear is not always our weakness; sometimes it's our strength. We hesitate to believe that God could truly work through us, bless others through us, or accomplish something through the gifts we've been given. Yet God hasn't entrusted those gifts to us by accident. When we have the courage to let them shine, we not only become more fully ourselves, but we help others discover the gifts God has placed within them as well.

The Book of Sirach expresses a similar truth:

My child, honour yourself with humility, and give yourself the esteem you deserve. Who will acquit those who condemn themselves? And who will honour those who dishonour themselves?

Let's encourage one another to honour not only the talents and gifts we have received, but also the gift each of us is as a beloved child of God. Let us help one another recognise our gifts, grow into them, and offer them in Christ's service.

Don't bury what God has entrusted to you. Don't allow fear, comparison, or self-doubt to keep your gifts hidden. Instead, be adventurous with God's generosity. Use what you've been given. Risk offering it for the blessing of others.

God entrusts ordinary people with extraordinary gifts. And as we use those gifts faithfully, the church is strengthened, our neighbours are blessed, and Christ is made known in the world.

May we live boldly and generously with what God has entrusted to us, looking forward to the day when we hear those words from today's Gospel: "Well done, good and trustworthy servant."

Generous God,
help us to recognise the gifts you have given us,
to encourage them in one another,
and to use them boldly in your service,
for the blessing of the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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