

Wesley United Methodist Church

November 16, 2014

"Are You a Risk Taker?"

Matthew 25:14-30

Are you a risk taker? Do you know someone who is?

A young man enlisted in the 82nd Airborne Division. He was assigned to their jump school. He eagerly asked his recruiter what he could expect at jump school. "Well," the recruiter said, "It's three weeks long." "What else?" asked the young soldier.

"The first week they separate the men from the boys," the recruiter said. "The second week, they separate the men from the fools." "And the third week?" the soldier asked. "The third week," the recruiter said with a grin, "the fools jump."

Does jumping from an airplane appeal to you?

Or are you more like the six-foot-eight-inch young man who applied for a job as a lifeguard? He stepped to the counter and announced, "I'm here about the lifeguard job." The recruiter asked, "Can you swim?" the applicant replied, "No, but I can wade pretty far out!" At six-foot-eight he might be able to do that without taking too much of a risk. I'm amazed at some of the risks young people are taking nowadays with so-called extreme sports.

Jesus once told a parable about a man who was going on a journey. Before going on that journey, the man...obviously a very wealthy man...called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one servant he gave five bags of gold. Someone has estimated it would total about two and one-half million dollars. To another servant he gave two bags of gold, worth about one million dollars, and to another one bag of gold, worth a half-million dollars. He gave to each of the servants, says Jesus, according to his ability. Then the wealthy man went on his journey.

Well, you know the story. The man who received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. I don't know where he got that kind of return. We need to know who his financial advisor was.

So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money...in the ground! This was quite a common practice, by the way, in that part of the world for people who didn't trust banks. Remember the man in another of Jesus' parables who is digging in a field and finds a treasure buried there. This may well have been some person's life savings that they had buried in that field and never retrieved.

After some time, the master of the servants returned to settle accounts. The man who had received five bags went first. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

His master was delighted. "Well done, good and faithful servant!" he said. "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The man with two bags came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more."

Again his master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness."

Then the man who had received one bag came. Can't you see him shuffling forward with his eyes downcast, afraid to look his master in the eye? "Master," he sort of mumbles, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

Let me pause here. If you had never heard this parable before, how would you expect the master to feel? He had entrusted his wealth to three servants. Two of them had not only protected that with which they had been entrusted, but they doubled it. Now this third servant is asked to account for his stewardship. And he is forced to announce that he had buried his master's wealth in the ground and had not added an ounce to

what he had been given. If you had been his boss, how would you feel? Disappointed? Frustrated? Perhaps even angry? Well, you got that right!

His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

"So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This is quite a remarkable parable. So many of Jesus' parables come from real life situations. They are designed to make us think.

Notice, first of all, that the third servant who took his master's gold and buried it in the ground did so because he was afraid. I wonder how many of us fail to be the people God has called us to be because we are afraid. Some of us are afraid of what other people will think of us. That often happens to us when we are young. We may do things we know we shouldn't do because we want to fit in, we want to be cool.

But it doesn't stop with our teen years. As we get older, we may give an anemic witness to our faith because we don't want our friends to think we're some kind of religious nut. Someone cracks a racist joke. We put on a social smile. We may even give a pleasant chuckle, even though it makes us uncomfortable. We don't want to offend our friends by expressing indignation. We're afraid of what others think. For some people this is the dominating fear in their lives. Some of us are cowards for Jesus. Mark Twain once said, "It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare."

A rapper has "updated" some of the advice given by the book of Ecclesiastes. Here is his version: "There's a time to speak up...and a time to shut up...There's a time to hunker down...and a time to go downtown...There's a time to talk...and a time to walk...There's a time to be mellow...and a time not to be yellow." Well, he's right. There is a time not to be yellow. The third servant who took his master's gold and buried it in the ground was yellow. He buried it because he was afraid. He said, "I know that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed..."

Is there any place in the parable that indicates his master was a hard man? He appears to be a generous man to me. He entrusted his servants with a considerable amount of money. And when two of the servants double his money he praised them lavishly, "Well done, good and faithful servant..."

Some people are afraid of others. And some people for some reason or another are afraid of God. They serve a God of vengeance and punishment. They distrust God and because they distrust God, they don't trust others. If you are here this morning out of fear, you probably don't enjoy worship very much. You're here because you're afraid that God will punish you if you stay home. No wonder there's so little joy and power in your faith. God is looking for people who love him and enjoy him. He loves all people and wants them to come to him. God is love.

Finally, notice how angry the master was at the man who buried his gold rather than invested it. "Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." What is darkness? Well, Jesus is light, the light of the world. Darkness is the absence of God.

It's important for us to realize this is a parable and not an allegory. Jesus is not telling us that God is exactly like the wealthy man in this story. But, this parable does make its point quite strongly. It is a terrible thing to bury the gifts God has given us and not use them. It's a terrible thing to give in to fear when God is calling us to stand up against evil. It's a terrible thing to live life cowering in fear rather than trusting God in all things.

Following Jesus means walking by faith not fear. Following Jesus means trusting God. Following Jesus means seeking to hear the Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," because we've attempted great things for God. Sure it involves risk. Every great advance in life does. But the rewards are incredible. How about you? How big of a risk are you willing to take for God?