

This is the one Sunday of the year, every year, when the Collect of the Day prays specifically about the *Bible*: “Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life...” And, indeed, we do believe that both the Bible and Holy Communion have been given to us, to sustain and guide us in our journey in God.

More often than not, I think we tend to fall into an assumption that we come to church *to be reminded of what we already think we know*. And that the purpose of our prayers and preaching is to return us to the *familiar*. And I think we come by this honestly enough, for we often come here for some sense of *assurance...safety and stability...a gathering in which to recover...and to be encouraged*. And the Bible can definitely do that...as the apostle Paul said: “Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.”

But the Bible also often confronts us with a *disorienting unfamiliarity*. If it isn't a question of how to pronounce “Har-o-sheth-ha-go-iim” in the reading from Judges...then it is the question of what a woman named Deborah was doing being a chieftain warlord...or what kind of unpredictable world crisis the apostle Paul was anticipating...or why Jesus' parable of the talents takes such an unexpected twist. And it is Jesus' parable that I especially want to speak to today.

This story from Jesus is can be a favorite in churches during annual stewardship campaigns because we may tend to assume that the moral of the story about the 3<sup>rd</sup> slave, who *buried* his talent, is an exhortation for us at church to *give our talents and money to the church and not bury them*. There is in fact a sensibility of stewardship to Jesus' parable, but it doesn't turn out to be quite what we'd expect.

Jesus' story is definitely a story about *money*. A “talent” was actually a sum of money in the 1<sup>st</sup> century that was roughly equivalent to the amount of money a laborer would earn in *16 years*. So, 2 talents was worth 32 years of a laborer's wage and 5 was worth a staggering *80 years*. So, even that 1 talent was *a lot of money*. We tend to miss this and interpret the talent as representing some natural aptitude or skill. But those folks listening to Jesus tell that story would have been immediately stunned at the amount of money involved.

And they would have been doubly stunned that that much money would have been entrusted by a master to his *slaves*. So, like so many other parables of Jesus, the story moves from the familiar into increasingly unfamiliar twists.

And the last big twist is who the hero of the story is. Jesus' audience, being mostly laborers themselves, would have most identified *with the slave with the 1 talent*—because they knew the peril that a slave would face from their master if a *single* denarii of that money was lost. So they would have been listening for Jesus to get to the point in the story where the slave given the 1 talent ended up being the *hero* and would have been praised for his prudence. *But instead, it is completely the reverse*. And it becomes clear that what began as a *familiar* story about money increasingly became an *unfamiliar* story about...*what?* And we, like they, are left to wonder.

It sounds to me that Jesus is saying that to be *truly awake and sober in our journey in God* then...surprisingly...we should be prepared...somewhere...sometime...to *risk*.

To step beyond the *familiar boundaries of frugality...caution...and fear*. To *risk venturing something new*. To risk in *giving* (yes, that is where stewardship does come in)...and sometimes also to risk *spending*. There will come times when the best way forward will be to risk...in order to possibly discover...a new beginning...with God.

There may be some personal message...here for you...that only you can know for yourself...

There may be some message...here for this parish...