

RISK-TAKERS AND CARE-TAKERS

33rd Sunday Ordinary Time

Year A

by Dcn. Tom McConnell

Prov 31:10-13,19-20,30-31; Ps 128:1-5; 1Thess 5:1-6; Mt 25:14-30

A man got mad at God. “God,” he said, I’ve been praying daily for three years that I should win the state lottery. You told us to ask and we shall receive. How come I never received all these three years I’ve been asking?” Then he heard the voice of God, loud and clear. “My dear son,” says God. “Before you ask me again, please do me a favor...and buy a lottery ticket.”

Now, this is not supposed to be a promotional for state lotteries. But rather, it illustrates the saying: “If you wanna win, you gotta play.” There are two kinds of people in our churches today: risk-takers and care-takers. The problem with care-takers is that they might show up at the under-taker’s with little to show for the lives they have lived. Jesus warns us against this in today’s Parable of the Talents.

In the parable we hear about “*a man going on a journey who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability*” (Matt 25:15). From the beginning of the story, we’re told that the servant who received just one talent is a man of little ability.

He's not a genius. Yet it's interesting to note that the master has a talent even for his relatively disabled servant. All of God's children have got their talents, even those who appear to have very minimal abilities in comparison with the more gifted children.

The master departs and the first two servants "went off at once and traded" with their talents. The third servant, on the other hand, digs a hole in the ground and buries his one talent. Why does he do that? Because he's afraid that he's going to lose it if he trades with it. He must have reasoned something like this: *"Well, those with more talents can afford to take a risk. If they lost a talent, they could make it up later. But me, I have only one talent. If I lose it, end of story! So, I better play it safe and just take care of it."* Many of us in the church are like this third servant. Because we don't see ourselves as possessing many outstanding gifts and talents, we conclude that there's nothing that we ought to do. Do you know a woman who loves to sing, but who won't join the choir because she's afraid that she's not gifted with a golden voice? Do you know a man who would like to spread the gospel, but is afraid he doesn't know

enough Bible and theology? When people like this end up doing nothing, they're following in the footsteps of the third servant who buried his one talent in the ground.

The surprise in the story comes when the master returns and demands an account from the servants. First, we discover that even though the first servant with five talents had made five more talents, and the second servant with two talents had made two more talents, both of them receive exactly the same compliment: *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master”* (verses 21, 23). They are rewarded, not in proportion to how many talents each has made, but in proportion to how many talents each of them started off with. Booker T. Washington was right on target when he once said that *“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles that one has overcome while trying to succeed.”*

There are more reasons than one why the third servant decided to hide his talent. Maybe he compared himself to the other

servants with more talents, saw himself at the bottom rung of the ladder, and became discouraged. He didn't realize that with his one talent, if he made just one more talent, he would be rewarded equally as the servant with five talents who made five more. We are not all measured by the same rule. To whom much is given, much is required.

All of us in the church today have received at least one talent. We've received the gift of faith. Our responsibility, as men and women of faith, is not just to preserve and "keep" the faith. We need to trade with it. We need to sell it to the men and women of our times. We need to promote and add value to faith. This is a venture that brings with it much risk and inconvenience. But, unless we do this, we stand in danger of losing the faith just as the third servant lost his talent. The way to preserve the faith, or any other talent that God has given us, is to put it to work and make it bear fruit. Jesus challenges you today to be a risk-taker, not a care-taker.

God bless you all!