

Not your ordinary talent show! [Matthew 25: 14-30](#)

The Parable of the Talents is a familiar topic for many school assemblies and the basis of many glitzy Saturday night TV shows. The parable is often used to highlight the wrongs of burying our skills, not trying hard enough in exams, or the waste of not making use of what gifts and resources we have.

The problem with these interpretations is that it ignores the conclusion of the parable, where the servant who hid his talent in the ground is not only thrown out into the pitiless darkness, but his money is given to the servant who has ten talents already.

The stakes in the Parable of the Talents are far higher, and the message far more uncomfortable.

Both the master who entrusts the servants with his money and the servants who are told to invest it are taking huge risks. Just one talent would be the equivalent of 15 years' wages for a simple labourer in Jesus' day, so the man who gives the three servants eight talents between them is handing over a total of 120 years' wages! He shows some forethought by dividing the money "each according to his ability", but the level of trust which he shows to them could be seen as utterly foolhardy.

The servants are also invited to take risks. If they are going to put the money they have been given "to work" by investing it in some way, there is always the risk that they could fail. Even the servant given one talent has been entrusted with a vast amount.

The first two servants have responded to the challenge which their master has set them and both double the amount given to them. They understand that they have been placed in a position of trust, and show that they are good stewards for their master. They call out like a delighted child to a parent, "See!" Look what I've done!

By contrast, the third servant erupts in savage criticism. He calls his master a hard man, accusing him of constantly leaving others to do his dirty work. This is an act of deliberate rebellion! He tries to justify his decision to bury the money in the ground by saying he was afraid. At least he hasn't lost any of the money he was given in the first place. He returns it exactly as it was given to him.

Money, unlike seeds, is not supposed to be buried if it is going to grow.



I wonder whether the reason why the master threw that third servant out was because of the servant's distorted, mistrustful view of him. He was, in every sense, revolting. That angry outburst would be deeply hurtful, breaking the bond between them. The master is lavish in the quantities he entrusts to each of his servants. He invites the two faithful servants to "Come and share your master's happiness." Looking at the conclusion of the

parable with this in mind, it appears that there is simply no place in the celebrations for the servant who stubbornly refuses to engage with the gift and challenge which he has been given.

Jesus told parables to give his listeners a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God was like. In this parable, he also points out what it is *not* like. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of growth and increase. God wants us to respond and be part of that growth, and entrusts us with his riches. The opposite of that is a world of fear, mistrust and apathy in which nothing can grow.

There is a huge risk in following God's way. In the greatest, riskiest venture of all, God's own Son, Jesus, came to earth as a human and died on the cross for our sake. Yet his resurrection shows us that the risk has its reward. Do we trust the loving God, whose good purposes are shown to us in Jesus? Do we behave as good and faithful stewards of all the resources which we have: in the natural world about us, with our own abilities, with sharing our faith with others?

Reflect again on this very familiar parable. Allow your imagination to play with the different characters. Use the special prayer for this Second Sunday before Advent to inspire you to action today.

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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