

Sunday, November 19, 2017

Judges 4:1-7

I Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Matthew 25:14-30

Gifted and Talented Because of God

This week we conclude our series on the journey of the people of Israel from slaves in Egypt to landowners living in the Promised Land. In our reading from Judges we hear that they have again turned away from God and so for 20 years the commander of the army had cruelly oppressed them. They eventually realize again that God could help them and so they cried to God. A prophetess, Deborah was leading Israel at the time and she often held court settling disputes as they arose between people. She was well respected and a leader of the people. She also believed in God. Deborah eventually led the army to gain control over another region and the people again believed in God and followed his ways. Deborah was a gifted leader as a faithful person of God. She was a prophetess and had strong faith in God who helped them all as they entered battle against oppression and to control land.

What are the gifts and talents God has blessed you with? Maybe you know the special skills you have and have been putting them into practice—like talking with people, or programming computers, building up skills in playing a sport, or playing music; maybe you like to read and then share ideas in small groups or even are gifted in listening to others. Or maybe you have a special way with helping dogs or cats or horses? All of these are gifts and talents and as one goes through life, you can determine new ideas of how to serve God. But how do you know what your gifts are and how they change as you grow older and learn about the world and your role in it?

Jesus talked about gifts and talents to a large crowd who had gathered to listen. He told a story about a man had to go away for a while and he entrusted his goods to his servants. To one he entrusted five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent. A talent was a measurement of weight and if the item measured were, for example, silver, the value of the talent might be \$1,000. That may not sound like an enormous sum to us in our inflationary times, but consider that as recently as 2005 the average worker in India earned 91 cents an hour. One thousand dollars would have been equal to a year of income. Similar conditions existed when Jesus told this story. Even the man with one talent would have been considered well-endowed in the estimation of his contemporaries. But what is important in this story is what each of the servants does with the talent or talents they have been given. One thing we must

realize is that everyone of us- has a talent, maybe not the same number or amount of talent but each person does have talent.

In the parable one person is given 5, another 2 and the third one talent. For people today we might think that some person's gifts are intensified because they have received them all in one field- ie. Shakespeare has a great deal of talent in literature; Michelangelo in art, even Alexander Graham Bell was given a talent of inventiveness. And there are many talented and gifted people today—in the world of sports, academic disciplines and entertainment. And God has gifted you with talents as well! It is not how many or what kind of gift or talent for which you have been blessed that is important it is= what you do with it that is most important!

Maybe you are thinking to yourself- I am a one talent person only what can I do with what God has given me? Or maybe you might be thinking about your children or grandchildren—they have been gifted in so many ways, are they using the talents God has given them, and are these being used to their fullest? Every talent God blesses each person with is needed in the wider understanding of our world. But what are we doing with these?

Many years ago a young boy contracted tuberculosis and could not go to school. However, able to go to church he heard Dwight L Moody preach on this passage about gifts and talents. This young boy listened to this message knowing that he was not a strong person physically and so prayed to God. He was clear in who he was as a young man and he knew that he could not be a preacher like Rev Moody but he could be a businessman. He prayed to God and asked, "God, if you will let me make money, I will use it in your service."

The young boy worked outdoors doing whatever he could and in time regained his health and strength. He then bought a little run down mill in Ravenna, Ohio in 1877. As general manager, president and chairman of the company from 1888 until 1943, the businessman kept his promise to God. Once the mill began making a profit for he and his co-workers, each year this man would give 60- 70% of his income to God's ministries. Within ten years millions of people knew about his mill for Henry Parsons Crowell had trademarked the Quaker name in 1901. The products he sold are still widely known as Quaker Oats and was brought into the Pepsico family in 2001.

Crowell who had once been ill, used the talent that God had blessed him with to make a profit milling oats. He then fulfilled his promise to give money to support the ministry of Jesus in whom he believed and lived out in faith. He was not gifted to sing or play sports, he was not

given anything beyond what one considers normal, but Crowell did not hide his talent, he invested it and the investment grew.

As Jesus' story continues. The master returns home after a long time. He calls in the servants to settle accounts with them. The servant who had been given 5 talents doubled his investment. The servant who had been given 2 talents also doubled the investment to make it 4 in all. But the one who had been given one talent had dug a hole in the ground and hid the money. The servant stated "I knew you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed so I was afraid and hid your talent in the ground." The servant returned to his master what belonged to him. But it is the master's response that we are interested in as well. He tells the servant- you knew that I harvest someone else's crop and gather what I can from scattered seeds, but you didn't even try to gain more money. You could have put the money in the bank and then I would have gained some interest. But you didn't even do this."

The master then gives this one talent to the servant who now has 10. And then throws out the servant into the darkness—outside. This servant is not even worthy to remain in the household. He is cast away from being a servant to this master. Why? Because he did not try to invest the talent given to him.

Instead he hid his talent and hoped for the best. Yet when we think about all that Jesus has taught his listeners – to care, give, trust, love, hope and witness to others about Him, we cannot but wonder what Jesus teaches in this story.

We are all gifted and given talents in this life—for some people these are realized fairly early in life. For others the gifts change throughout one's life and it is merely an opportunity each day to discern what they are and what they might mean in sharing of oneself with others. Yet we are to do something—to take the chance and risk our lives for the sake of others. The Christian faith depends upon this investing of gifts; investing and using talents and most of all understanding what it is we are called to do and believe.

Deborah was a gifted woman- a prophetess and leader of her people. As a woman she was given authority in an era where women were not empowered to lead. In Jesus' parable the three servants are given an opportunity to invest their talents and in the long term both the servants who had received 5 and 2 talents did right. The one servant who is often overlooked is the 2 talent person- he was entrusted with a medium amount of talent yet did more than what was expected over all. With which servant might you identify with—the one who had 5 or 2

talents? Just how are you investing these gifts given to you by God? How are you investing in the ministry of Jesus Christ? And are you willing to risk your life for the sake of others?

Each of us have been blessed by God- with talents—some known already and in practise; some unknown and waiting to be discovered; and many yet to be developed or to be discerned in the future. Yet do we use these talents to help Christ's story to be shared? His ministry to be heard? And for the purpose of making disciples in this place? If we do we need to pool our talents and support each other just as we are doing. We need to encourage each other and build each other up.

God loves you and has blessed each one of us with talents- these are yours to discover and of course to risk for the sake of others who follow Christ. This we do in Jesus name. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray.

God we praise you this day for the many blessings and talents you have given to us. We lift up to you in thanksgiving the joy and wonder of being your faithful followers. Lift us up O God as we seek your guidance and strength; to be and become the people you want us to be. Help us to risk our talents and gifts for your sake and for the ministry of Jesus our Saviour. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.