

# God Calls Us To Invest Wisely

Pentecost 22A – November 13, 2011

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18 - Psalm 90:1-8, 12 - 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 - Matthew 25:14-30

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Do I believe in a God who judges us on how we perform - and casts us into outer darkness if we don't turn a profit?

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This is the next-to-the -last parable from Jesus that we will hear in the Gospel of Matthew. It has been a long season of parables.

During a journey with Matthew we have learned that in a parable, things are seldom as they first appear. The parable we are given today begins, *"It as if a man, going on a journey . . ."* Notice that it does **not** begin: *The kingdom of heaven will be like a man, going on a journey. . .* Neither does it begin: *Our Father who art in heaven is like a man, going on a journey . . .*

This parable of the talents – at least to my reading – has nothing whatsoever to do with showing us how the kingdom of heaven is something like present-day American-unregulated-capitalism – extolling the virtue of using the wealth of others, to make even more wealth for one's self.

There is a new version of this parable circulating this past week. It goes something like this:

Once there was this guy. He had a ton of money. Just how much *is* a ton of money? It's understandably hard to get our heads around the ancient Near-East concept of 'a talent' as a form of currency. So instead talking about talents – let's use dollars. And to put this guy in context, we'll use as an example of the average income of the top 25 hedge fund managers in 2009.

2009 is an interesting year to pick. It was December 2008 when the current Recession was officially recognized to have begun. So it comes to pass that in 2009 – the first full year of the Recession – the income of the top 25 hedge fund managers was - \$25 billion. That's a billion dollars for each one. Billion with a B. One billion dollars of income – in the first year of the Recession.<sup>i</sup>

So let's just say that the guy in this parable is clearly within the 1%.

And in the parable, acting something like Donald Trump on the TV show *The Apprentice*, he picks three people. Now he's smart enough to **not** turn over all of his money to these three people. So to one he gives \$ 50 million. To the second he gives \$ 20 million. To the third he gives \$ 1 million.

The first two play the game. They invest his money. And **probably not** by investing in micro-loans so that poor women in India or Africa can start a business and eventually buy a goat or a cow to help feed their family.

But the third slave? He doesn't play along. It turns out that he has joined the Occupy movement. Not Occupy Wall Street of course. Maybe it was the Occupy the Galilee, or Occupy the Court of the Moneychangers in the Temple.

When the rich guy come back and demands his take, the third slave returns his \$1 million and says: "Do you have any earthly idea how afraid of you, people are? You wheel and deal with money that's not yours. You are rewarded for "creating wealth" where you didn't have in stake in the success or failure of the enterprise. (By that way - that's what '*reaping where you did not sow*' and '*gathering where you did not scatter seeds*' means).

The banks you invest in evict people who have lost their shirts in this economic downturn – while you earn \$ 1 billion dollars in a single year. You invest in companies that increase profits by laying off thousands and thousands of workers. I'm not going to work for you. I buried your money in a hole in the ground. Here it is back."

The rich guy blows a gasket. "You bet your boots I reap where I do not sow" he says. "And I sure do gather where I do not scatter seed. That's the way this old world works." And of course, in the parable, according to the King James Version, the rich guy says "*cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

Or - like Donald Trump on TV, he points his finger at the slave whose interests seem to line up with the Occupy the Galilee movement, and says "You're fired."<sup>ii</sup>

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This parable *did not* begin: *The kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey . . .* And *it certainly did not begin*: *Our Father who*

*art in heaven is like a man, going on a journey . . .*

But next week we are confronted with the *last* of the parables of Jesus that Matthew recorded for us. And that parable presumes to tell us exactly what the kingdom of heaven will be like. It will tell us precisely what will happen before the judgment seat of God.

When we each will be asked to respond to questions about the hungry, and the naked, and the thirsty, and the sick, and those in prison.

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Parables are supposed to shake us up. They weren't designed by Jesus to make us feel good. And certainly not to make us feel good about ourselves. They should force us to look into the mirror of our souls and figure out if we like what we see.

This parable demands that we face up to the question of just what kind of God do we believe in?

Do I believe in a God reserves the best rewards for those who already have greater wealth than most of us can really imagine?

Do I believe in a God who judges us on how we perform - and casts us into outer darkness if we don't turn a profit?

Or do I instead believe in a God who challenges me to confront and ask serious questions of the systems and the institutions who exploit and in some cases ruin people for the sake of a better return on investment? Do you instead, believe in a God who identifies with the outcasts of this world – in a God who chooses to share in their lot?

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The wise investments to which we are called by God are more about how we engage our

hearts, and our minds, and our souls, in mending and repairing the fabric of creation. Creation that has been so worn out – stretched beyond recognition – and in some places torn to bits, by war, and famine, and greed.

The wise investments to which we are called by God are more about how we nurture and love the children given into our care. Whether those children come our way from our own bodies, or through foster care or adoption, or in the Sunday school classes, or in our Summer Camp. Children who come our way in our schools, or the football teams that we coach.

The wise investments to which we are called by God are more about how we respond when we meet someone who is hungry.

How we react when confronted by someone who is going to be cold this winter.

How we deal with the fact that 6,000 children die will die today. And 6,000 children died yesterday, and that 6,000 children will die every day into the foreseeable future– because the water they drink is so bad.

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Being a good steward has so very, very little to do with money.

God help us, God please help us, to invest wisely.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/01/business/01hedge.html>

ii Steve Garnaas-Holmes, a United Methodist pastor in Massachusetts retells the parable in this fashion on his blog <http://unfoldinglight.net/>