

**State College Presbyterian Church**

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It is All About Capacity

Matthew 25:14-28

You have heard a parable about three servants – and what their master did. Our text is from Matthew 25:15:

“to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one,”

That may not sound like much, but a talent is not just one coin. In fact, even one talent is a substantial amount of money. So to help our understanding let us suppose that to one he gave five thousand silver coins, to another two thousand, and to another one thousand. And then we come to the really important part of the text:

“to each according to his ability. Then he went away.”  
Matthew 25:15

The master gave money to each **according to their ability**.

Maybe a better translation would be “capacity.”

“Capacity” catches the sense of the text better than “ability.”

He filled their hands with what he knew they could manage and sent them out, to work with what he had given them.

The servants with the larger capacity doubled the return.

The servant with the smaller capacity could have doubled the return, but did not.

Instead he said: "I knew you were a hard man, master, so I hid your money in a sock."

Really?

The master gave the 1000 coiner more than he could handle?

It says right here: “He gave to each according to his capacity.”

As Jesus has given this parable to us, the 1000 coiner had all he could hold, but not more than he could handle.

And he dropped the ball.

The master?

Jesus never said whether the master was as harsh in fact as the 1000 coiner perceived him.

"I knew you were a hard man; you reap harvest where you did not plant, and you gather crops where you did not scatter seed."

Jesus never said whether it was true.

But the 5000 coiner and the 2000 coiner produced double and entered into the happiness of their master.

So there's some justification that the master is as perceived by the 1000 coiner.

Consider all the things the master might have said when the servants brought in their accounts.

He could have said, "Two out of three ain't bad."

He could have said, "Thank goodness the smallest portfolio is the only one that showed no gain."

He could have said, "Well, little ventured, little gained!"

He could have said, "We will send you to the next training institute."

Instead he said: "You bad and lazy servant. If you perceived me as one who demands a return, even where I didn't plant, then why didn't you at least try for a return? Take the money away from him. Throw the bum out."  
"

The motivation is obscure. We do not know whether the master gets ego satisfaction out of producing good effective servants. Or whether his self worth is tied in with production.

As in justification by production.

All we know for sure is that the master is happy when his servants **double what has been given them.**

And lambasts those who bury what has been given them.

No one seems to be exempt from the master's insistence on, preoccupation with production.

So, what's this parable about?

The Kingdom of heaven will be like this

"The Kingdom of heaven will be like -- what?

Something to do with a demanding master?

Who wants some return from everybody?

The Kingdom of heaven will be for those who double what they have been given?

The Kingdom of heaven will move through the world with no tolerance for fearful hidiers?

The way I've been taught about the Kingdom of heaven bares little resemblance to this parable.

I thought the Kingdom of heaven was a voluntary thing.

You do your best, under the circumstances, and if it doesn't get done, well, maybe next time.

Never did anyone intimate that the Kingdom would turn against me if I didn't do something.

Weren't you taught the same way?

So what is Jesus telling us God wants? Wants from us?

Does this parable mean God wants more than we can possibly do?

Or is it just the opposite?

God wants just what we can possibly do?

God wants what we have the capacity to do?

Isn't that what the parable says?

Even the 1000 coiner was not expected to produce past his capacity for production. In fact, nothing was expected from him except to live up to his capacity.

That is what Jesus says in the text: "to each according to his ability."

So Jesus assures us: the 1000 coiner had the ability. He had the God given capacity.

Thursday is the national holiday when we thank God for what we have been given.

According to this parable, the master (read God) has given each of us some capacity for that which pleases the master.

Some of us have a lot, like the 5000 coiner.

Some have less, like the 1000 and 2000 coiners.

But still, God has given all of us that capacity to please God and be welcomed into God's Kingdom.

So here is the question, what are the riches God has given us?

What are the coins of those who dwell in the Kingdom of God?

No question – scripture tells us (Galatians 5). Scripture calls them “fruits of the spirit” but that means the same thing as the riches of God's Kingdom!

The coins of the Kingdom of Heaven which God gives us to invest and multiply in this life.

They are:

love,  
joy,  
peace,  
patience,  
kindness,  
goodness,  
faithfulness,  
gentleness,  
self-control;

Even if we use the scale in the parable of 1000 to 5000.

Coins of the Kingdom.

Love, sharing God's love is one coin of the kingdom.

Giving kindness is another.

Being patient is another.

Gentleness is another.

All part of the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And I think the key understanding this parable brings us is:

all of us have **different** capacities – for love, joy, peace, patience, all the rest.

More: all of us have **ranges** of capacity within ourselves.

On a scale of 1000 to 5000 let's say you have 5000 capacity for joy and 1000 capacity for the patience to put up with negative people who refuse to share your joy.

Or vice versa.

Let's say, they are two capacities given to us.

What does God want from us?

Apparently the master will allow us to enter the happiness of the kingdom if we can double the 5000 worth of joy we have the capacity for?

Always go with your strength, right?

But of course you will.

So that is the easy part.

What about the 1000 of patience?

For those with little capacity, it takes patience to be patient!

It's so little on the relative scale that we don't have enough patience to be patient.

So why try?

I'll bury it.

Everybody just has to accept that I'm an impatient person.

What does the master say about that?

If we don't try to double what we have been given, not only will we lose the 1000 worth of capacity, but the master will turn on us, will turn against us.

If we lose the patience, our 5000 worth of joy becomes not true joy, but some charade of positive thinking, optimism, keep your sunny side up.

The parable doesn't talk about equalizing everything out. So that everything is 5000 worth.

It's much more realistic.

But the parable does expect, demand growth.

You can play the scale yourself.

What is 5000 capacity in you?

On Thursday will you thank God for giving you lots and lots of love,

or will it be joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness, self-control that God has given you in super abundance?

I notice that people with a lot of love, or kindness, or gentleness have no trouble at all doubling or tripling what they have so much of.

But let's be honest. We are lucky, and rather remarkable, if God has given us a 5000 capacity for more than one or two of those Marks of the Kingdom.

Most of us are lucky to have a 1000 or 2000 share of even some of them.

Yet what a joy to be given even that much love, joy, gentleness in our life.

A 1000 or 2000 share of any of those is a wondrous thing to have!

But maybe not so easy to double?

If love is a mark of the kingdom, and you have a 1000 capacity for love – if you can share love only with your family -- how do you collect interest on your fear of loving?

If what you have been given less of **isn't** growing. . . gentleness, kindness, self-control. . .

The Kingdom will **not allow no growth**.

I can only trust that you will work on the scale of capacities by yourself.

What we discover is that it is easier to keep hidden what we have little of, what has collected no interest for some, what we are afraid to reveal in ourselves lest we be thought weak, or naive, or a loser.

Our God has gifted us with different capacities.

Eventually, we each have to confront the capacities God has given us.

Because God wants a return on investment.

On every investment.

Even the smallest.

Because we have the capacity.

To double even the smallest investment of love, patience, peace, kindness, gentleness.

Even the smallest can grow.

Question for Thanksgiving then is:

What does God want to grow in me?

In you?

In this congregation?

Not for self-realization.

Not because it would help us be better people.

Not to maximize our gifts.

But because that's what the Kingdom of God is like.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.