**Joy of Stewardship – Talents**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

10/18/15

Thought for Meditation:

 Who we are made to be: that is up to God. How we use what God designed: that is up to us. We can use our talents in many ways. Some benefit the world. Some benefit only us. Some are of no benefit to anyone. *Will Willimon*

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Dad came home from work mad because a deadline was moved up and the pressure of finishing his project was eating him up. He was going to have to work at least four hours after dinner. Mom also came home upset. She had overheard several her co-workers making some rude comments about other people in the office. Now she was worried what they said about her. Both Mom and Dad wanted a little sympathy from each other. Neither one got it. They sat down at the dinner table, cranky and grumpy. Emily, their five-year-old daughter, prayed for dinner “God, it's Emily. How are you? I'm fine, thank you. Mom and Dad are mad. I don't know why. We've got birds and toys and mashed potatoes and each other. Maybe you can get them to stop being mad? Please do, or it's just gonna be you and me having any fun tonight. Amen.”

A man made an appointment with his pastor. He came into the office and slumped down into a chair. “It used to be so easy to be joyful. When I first became a Christian joy just overflowed. I was always smiling and laughing. Now my faith seems so bland, my prayers are routine and my life is boring. Nothing is really wrong – I’ve just lost my joy. What should I do?”

Have you ever been there? There are times in life when joy is easy. It bubbles up inside of us. What do you do when joy becomes a struggle? I’m not talking about those times when you are in the midst of a crisis or going through grief. Those are different issues. I’m talking about ordinary life that just doesn’t seem exciting any more. It’s just boring. It’s ordinary.

 Where do you find joy in a life that seems to be missing it? When you are bored or just feeling blah, what can you do to experience the joy of the Lord? That’s the question I want us to think about this morning.

Jesus told a parable about a man who went on a journey. Before the journey he called his servants together and gave them talents. The word “talent” is actually a Greek word and its meaning has changed. Today it means the ability to do something, but originally the word “talent” meant a balance, something used to weigh items. Over time it came to refer to a specific weight, usually a weight of metal, that was used on the balance. Depending on the type of metal – copper, silver, gold – it was worth different amounts. Commentaries have a variety of opinions on how much the talent that Jesus mentions is worth. Some suggest that a talent is worth $1000, others say it might be worth $400,000, which means that the five talent servant received anywhere from $5,000 to $2,000,000. Either way it was a significant amount of money.

When the wealthy man gave the talents to his servants, he expected them to use the talents and grow them. Two of the servants used their talents and produced more. The third servant hid his talent in the ground. That was actually a fairly common practice at the time and was considered the safest way to keep money.

Just as the rich man gave talents to his servants, Jesus has given us talents, not only money, but especially our abilities. Until Jesus returns he expects us to use them. Paul, rather than talking about talents, talked about spiritual gifts. God gave to each one of us a gift, or a talent, to be used for the ministry of God’s kingdom.

I want to do something different this morning. Rather than challenging you to use your talents or inspiring you to use your gifts, I want you to hear the stories of some members of this church who have used their talents for ministry.

Family Promise Report

1. Explain Family Promise – Grace Peters
2. Letters – Grace Peters
3. Cooks – Grace P & Jan McGuire
4. Visit with Guests – all
5. Drive Van – Dan Peters

What you have heard is a story of people using their talents to share God’s love. How many of you can cook a meal for a group of people? How many people do we have here who can drive? Is there anyone here who can talk and visit with other people? How many of you can make a bed? How many of you can sleep on a mattress other than your own? We have the talents here to do a ministry like Family Promise. Other people have other talents that can be used to share God’s love.

Let me go back to the beginning, to where I started this sermon. Where do we find joy? What can we do to bring joy into our lives? Joy comes by being the person you were created to be and by doing what God has gifted you to do. When you use your talents joy will be part of your life.

In the Parable that Jesus told, do you remember how the master responded to the first two servants, the ones who used their talents to make more? He said, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave.” Hearing that you have done a good job will bring joy into your life.

On Facebook this week, there was a cartoon that caught my attention. It got the attention of a lot of pastors. The caption was “When pastors dream.” It had a picture of a pastor outside of his church, after worship. There was a big fist coming down from heaven – God gives a fist-bump to the pastor. As He gives the fist-bump, God says “Great sermon, Bill.” I appreciate it when people give me compliments and comments about my sermons. I hope no one is offended by this, but the best compliment you could give me would not bring me as much joy as hearing God say “Good sermon, Doug. Well done, good and faithful servant.”

On top of that, notice what the master said to the two servants after that. “Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23). Using our talents for ministry, to build the kingdom of God, will lead to entering into the joy of God.

Remember that man, at the beginning of my sermon, who made the appointment with his pastor to talk about joy? He was surprised by how his pastor responded.

“How have you given joy to someone else? Have you shared your faith with your family or with people at work? Have you invited anyone else to become a follower of Jesus? Have you served people in the community who are hurting? Where are you serving at our church? In what ways are you using the gifts that God has given to you?”

Joy is not something you can store up. We only keep joy by giving it away. Our joy grows as we share in the work of Christ in the world. You find joy by doing what God has created you to do, by using the talents you have been given and being the person that God made you to be.

 I invite you to spend some time in prayer, asking God to lead you and guide your thoughts as you reflect on three questions:

1. What talents has God given to me that I could use to share the good news of Jesus?
2. Where is God calling me to use my talents?
3. What do I need to use my talents?

Then close your prayer by asking God to open the doors that will enable you to use your talents and hear Jesus say to you: “Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.” In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.