



SAINT MARK'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

It seems I've come full circle. My first Sunday preaching here I preached about gifts and talents, and my last Sunday it seems I am to do it again. Now, this morning I am talking about gifts and talents poured out by the Holy Spirit, while that first Sunday 5 ½ years ago I talked about the parable of the talents—so maybe they're not alike. Or are they?

The Holy Spirit can be tricky that way. And it is Pentecost.

So let's follow the thread between gifts and talents, and the parable of the talents a bit further. We'll humor the Holy Spirit. Let's start with the parable of the talents.

“And the master gave to one person one talent, and to another, two and another five.”

Coins—that's what we usually picture, right? A talent represents a quantity of denarii and denarii are coins, but a talent is not a coin.

A talent is a measure of weight.

Originally, a talent was roughly the equivalent of the 'full measure of weight a grown man could carry'.

Then, eventually, a talent came to mean the specific *sum of money* which was based on the amount of coins a grown man could carry. A talent represented, roughly, 6000 coins. 6000 coins translated to the amount an average man would earn in 15-20 years.

So-- one talent would represent more than 15 years' worth of wages. That's what one man was given. Another was given 30 years of wages, and the third was given 75 years' worth of wages. That's a lot of wealth.

Why would the master do such a thing? Why does the Master do anything?

Because the Master is generous and believes in us.

Is there a connection between the Parable of the Talents and the gifts and talents of Pentecost?

Why bless you, Holy Spirit, I think there is.

The parable of the talents tells us that God blesses us with unimaginable amounts of wealth—in the form of the raw material each human being is born with—life force, skills and gifts. God pours out God's spirit on us, and gives us "talents" of staggering amounts. And we can either choose to use them or to bury them, as in the parable.

I think we sometimes define gifts and talents very narrowly- for example: an aptitude for sports, great intelligence, or Mother Teresa's compassion. We overlook other gifts we possess because we underestimate their worth.

A gentle touch on the arm when one is overcome can be a gift. A person who knows when to be silent – such a gift. A person who takes the shawl off their back for another: gift. A person who notices and responds when someone is stressed: gift. A mentor to young priests: priceless gift.

But God gives each of us at least the full weight of what we can carry. That's a staggering load. God doesn't ask for anything in return—except that we risk using what we have been freely given. Our lives are our gift from God. If our life is our treasure: how will we spend it?

And then we move to this Sunday-- the Pentecostz-- where God pours out gifts of the spirit to the old and the young, people of all genders and all classes—and it becomes crystal clear—our life IS our treasure.

I think the Holy Spirit has made this connection for me – for us— between the parable of the talents and the outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit because I've seen firsthand how God's gifts can be used to bring about the kingdom.

You are a congregation filled with gifts and talents poured out on you by the Spirit, and you've used them in situations both large and small. I've been honored to share moments of great pain and great joy with some of you.

I was carried by your love and prayers when I turned to you in my pain. That was not easy for a gruff New Englander, but you all taught me that it is possible for many people to help carry another's heavy burden.

It's impossible for me to tell you how much a priest loves a parish. But priests must learn detachment. We are itinerant. We are not destined to be in one church forever. Our job is to love you and then let you all go.

And I must stop saying "you all" when I go back north. I haven't quite gotten to the point of saying y'all—but my "you all" is getting mighty close. It'll be a difficult habit to break.

I'll miss Arkansas. I've lived in a lot of beautiful states, but usually you get tired of something—like the relentless sunshine in Florida, or the dryness and searing heat of the desert, but I can honestly say that there wasn't once in Arkansas when I felt like there was something here I couldn't live with for the rest of my life.

Well—maybe except for that week we had a horrible ice storm—but that was the *only time*.

But the most important thing about Arkansas, about this beloved church, about life—is the people. The people make the place.

And such people you are. You are people generous with your love, generous in your faith, and generous in your prayers.

But even though I am traveling to a distant place, remember that the Spirit that birthed the church, that gave us our special gifts and talents, and that brought me here, will never allow time to break the bonds of affection that tie us together.

You will all be in my prayers, and please keep me in yours. We are one in the Spirit.

When we pray for people it's like turning on the faucet of God's love that runs through everybody. That's why prayer is so effective. Prayer is like opening up a link between people. Prayer is perhaps there to remind us that even though we seem to lead very separate lives, we are --in God's greater reality-- always connected.

So as I was sent, so I send you. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.