

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, November 19, 2023

“Risk and Reward”

“*Young at Heart*” Message

Let's pretend for a moment that I'm extremely independently wealthy.

I earned that money by being pretty dishonest, taking advantage of situations and of people.

I know, I know – it's hard to believe because I'm a pastor, but bear with me for a minute.

I am going to be going away for a little while, but my money works really hard for me and I don't want to let it sit idle while I'm gone.

So, I have three volunteers who have agreed to help me keep my money safe.

I am going to give each person some of my money before I go. While I'm gone, they're going to do their best to make even more money for me.

BUT, they absolutely cannot *lose* any of my money, or else!

The first person will get \$3,797,175.

The second person will get \$1,518,870.

And the third person will get \$759,435.

Remember, the goal is to use that money to make as much extra money as you can while I'm away, but absolutely do not lose any.

You can ask members of the church for help, but some of them might take your money, and others might double it. Choose wisely what you do with my money.

[Jamie leaves and the volunteers decide what to do with her money]

[Jamie Returns]

So, how did you all do?

The first volunteer asked the church for help, and doubled their money! They now have \$7,594,350 for me.

The second volunteer also asked for help, and doubled their money! They now have \$3,037,740.

However, the third volunteer decided not to risk losing all my money, and instead returned the exact amount I gave them. A pittance compared to what they could have earned for me.

I am not a benevolent pastor! I entrusted this money to them, and two of them earned me significant money in return and will be rewarded.

But the third volunteer will be banished from my sight! I am going to take their money and give it to the one who received the most, because at least they are willing to risk something to earn even more money for me.

Harumph.

### ***The Message***

Yes, I know, that was a silly retelling of our scripture passage today. But, there was a purpose to retelling it this way.

It is important to understand what exactly a “talent” is in this passage.

A talent is a unit of currency which, at that time, was equivalent to approximately 15 years worth of wages.

The average annual salary in Alberta as of October was \$50,629. So, 15 years worth of wages using that average would amount to \$759,435.

The first servant in our scripture passage today was given 5 talents. So, if we do the math, that amounts to \$3,797,175. In other words, that amount of money was equivalent to 75 years worth of wages for that servant.

The second servant was given 2 talents, or approximately 30 years worth of wages.

And of course the third servant was given 1 talent, or approximately 15 years worth of wages.

The point in doing this exercise is to impress upon you the magnitude of what this “master” was entrusting his servants with.

And, he was not a benevolent man. He was giving his servants this money and trusting that they would go and use his shady methods to earn even more money.

This money was not a gift. There were strings attached.

This was clearly not a small amount of money. Most of us couldn't even fathom what it would be like to hold \$750,000 in our hands, let alone \$3.7 million.

These servants also presumably were quite trusted by their master. They were not brand new servants – there is no way this master would give servants he hardly knew this money.

These servants knew how the master earned his money.

So, there was also the threat of a master who “reaped where he did not sow and scattered where he did not scatter seed.”

In other words, he was doing some shady things to earn his abundant wealth. And, he expected his servants to use similar methods when he entrusted his money to them.

As is true for many of our scripture readings, and for many of the parables Jesus shares, there are multiple ways we could look at and interpret this story.

Certainly, we could see some of the implications of capitalism, and the hard reality of a world where we all are encouraged to do things we may not do otherwise in the name of earning extra money.

We could also talk about the master and the way we treat other people we work with, live with, or otherwise interact with on a regular basis.

There are many different ways we could focus our attention, and many different lessons we could take from this passage. Jesus seemed to like to provide pastors with options for Sunday mornings.

What I want to focus on today is this notion of abundance, risk, and reward.

For today's purposes, let's set aside the parts of this story where the master does shady things and condemns the third servant. That's a totally different sermon for another day.

If we look at Jesus as the master in this story, and we consider the talents each servant receives as traits like love, grace, mercy, and peace, we can recognize that these servants of Christ have more than enough resources to go out into the world and do amazing ministry.

And the first two servants do just that. They take their currency – their love, grace, mercy, and peace – and they spread it, and what comes back to them is doubled.

The doors of opportunity were opened to them, and they took the risk and walked through the doors.

Another way of looking at this would be to say they were called by Christ, and they said "here I am Lord. I will go, Lord. Send me."

The third servant, however, is filled with fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of the master's response if he fails, and fear of failure itself. So he hides the grace, love, mercy, and peace he was given.

He had good intentions of keeping them safe, of course. But those good intentions prevented him from using those traits to do good in the world.

The doors were opened, the call was made, but he was afraid to walk through for fear of failure.

His fear led him to be paralyzed.

How often, in ministry or in life, do we become paralyzed by fear?

Fear of taking certain risks, fear of failure if we try, or fear of losing everything we have.

So instead, we hoard resources. We metaphorically bury the gifts we have been given out of fear of losing them.

What if our call or our purpose is to use these gifts, to take risks, to share them with the world in ways we could not even imagine without God's guidance?

It is true that taking risks could lead to failure. But even in failure, there is often abundant opportunity for growth.

And, often, even in failure, there is success as we learn something new about ourselves, about our relationship with God, or about the world.

Jesus wants us to use the gifts we have been given – whether that's money, time, talent, energy, or other resources – in ways that honour ourselves and others.

He does not want us to bury our resources. He wants us to use them to thrive.

Taking some risks – and being open to the possibility of failing or making mistakes – allows us to grow not only personally, but also in our faith and in our ministries.

May we always be open to this growth. Amen.