

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend Geoffrey S. Royce, Deacon  
Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
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Have you ever wondered, or actually thought, the life you are living is perhaps not the life God intended for you? Or perhaps even further that you want to be able to shed your life like one taking off a coat and putting on a different one, one that fits better, is more true or has some other perhaps further spiritual purchase.

For some of us, the beginning of this thought comes from something deeply uncomfortable. Most people are almost always there because most people are uncomfortable in their heads, alone with their own thoughts. I've often thought that perhaps this is God's way of making sure that we not imagine that we are going to do whatever we do on our own. If you find yourself there, turn to God's word.

Our gospel today is a parable that can make us uncomfortable. I think that is what it is designed to do. I don't know about you but the mention of there even being an outer darkness into which one can be thrown gives me the willies. And then there's the sudden destruction mentioned in the epistle and ruin and devastation in the book of Zephaniah.

And while there are some things I would rather not encounter, my preferences are simple, easy and generally very available. My deep discomfort is that these basic and simple things are not available to everyone.

So, let's wrestle with this uncomfortable Parable of the Talents. First let's agree that we don't want to assign any particular identities to its cast of characters. We'll just look at their relationships.

There is a man, a master he is called by one of his servants. This man decides he has to travel, to be out of town. He decides also to leave some portion, maybe much of his wealth behind in the care of three of his servants. He also decides, rather than giving each the same amount, to leave different amounts of his wealth with each of them. This seems to imply that there is a deficit of trust governing this decision. He trusts each of them to a different extent. Where there is a deficit of trust, there is no real trust. This is the first uncomfortable relationship. Either this or his trust is without meaning or arbitrary which is nihilism. Jesus is not generally given to detailing nihilism in the stories he tells. Though he does often question or reinterpret tradition, he never abandons it.

In leaving this wealth behind the master seems to abdicate responsibility for it. He doesn't offer any instruction as to his purpose in distributing this wealth. Maybe he is protecting it. Maybe he is enhancing his chances by gathering the ingenuity of others. And the parable tells us that he goes away for a long time. We can wonder does he even care? This is the second uncomfortable relationship.

There is a third uncomfortable relationship, an asymmetry of access to power, opportunity and influence. A talent is a measure of weight applied to precious metals like gold or silver. Even the servant who only gets one talent would have been perceived as a rich man. Some estimates say that a talent of silver would equal the wages for 6000 days. He would certainly have been in a different and lesser league than the servants given two and five talents. Those servants would be able to operate, as we would say today, "at scale", with the resources to solve almost any problem. And so, they do, proving the commercial axiom that it takes money to make money. Or that you must have credit in order to get more credit.

The servant with only one talent falls unsurprisingly and understandably into the slot on this asymmetrical totem pole to which he has been consigned. Not trusted to a comparable degree he falls into self-doubt. Perhaps he has passed through anger and dejection before reaching acedia (spiritual torpor) and hopelessness. He is stuck. The process of comparison will never reveal the true measure of a person, an institution, even an outcome. When you don't know what to do the safest thing is to do nothing. And who among us has not looked out upon the events and the available horizons of this world and not thought and even felt deeply uncomfortably "I don't know what to do." WE don't know what to do. Hopelessness provides a kind of numbing comfort. It does not demand anything because there is nothing to be done.

But with hope there comes something to do. This servant gets stuck and that makes it easy for us to identify with him . How many times have any of us, after calculating risk against security in a moment when we have believed that we had nothing left to lose, and then reached the conclusion, "I can't afford to do this." In other words, I can't afford to fail. The fact is that our faith brings the opposite response. WE cannot afford not to. Doing nothing denies grace and mercy. The monk in me still always wants to examine the necessity or importance of "doing something."

But all our Christian directives are about a particular way of doing something. They are about actions that bring transformation. Transformation is the actual goal. Prayer (that reaches beyond worldly authority) is transformational action. Witnessing, (in public demonstrations of truth) is transformational action. Loving our neighbors (in the form of dynamic creative interchange) is transformational action. These have always been among the ways given us to embrace our debt, the acknowledgement of what we have been given and what has been done for us, knowing we will fail to repay that debt. And yet it will be forgiven us And that's alright. But you O Lord, have mercy on us.