

## **The Risk of Sharing**

**Matthew 25:14-30**

**Second Baptist Church, Memphis**

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This month we have been focusing on this phrase, “Fulfilling the Vision.” By “fulfilling the vision” we mean fulfilling God’s vision for each one of us individually and fulfilling God’s vision for our church together.

For the last three Sundays all of our adults and teenagers have been meeting together in the fellowship hall for one huge Sunday School class. The focus of the classes has been on helping us to discover three things about ourselves: our spiritual gifts, our personal style, and our God-given passion.

When we think about being engaged in service and ministry and being involved in the life of our church—when you think about what you can and should be doing with your life, it really is those three things about yourself that you need to take a look at.

- What are my spiritual gifts?

- What is my personal style? That means, What energizes me? How am I organized? How do I like to operate?
- What is my passion?

And what’s going to happen now is that you will be given the opportunity to plug in to one or more of the different ministry areas of our church—in other words, an opportunity to express your gifts, style, and passion.

What more appropriate scripture for us to look at today than Jesus’ parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

A man was going on a long journey, so he called three of his slaves together and entrusted them with his money. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one. The master wants his money to work for him while he is away; he’s expecting a return on his investment when he gets back.

The one with the five talents put the money in an aggressive growth plan and soon doubled his investment. The one with the two talents did the same. But the one who had received the one talent went off and buried his one talent in the ground to

make sure he didn't lose any of it. That one is seeming wiser and wiser these days.

When the master came back, he was pleased to see that the first two slaves had made good investments and had doubled his money.

The third slave, though, was condemned harshly by the master for not having even put the money in a savings account to draw interest from the bank. Even the one talent he had was taken from him.

Jesus has not called us to play it safe. When I think back over my sermons, one word that I think I have used quite a bit is "risk." And really, I do believe that the major themes of the Christian life—caring, giving, witnessing, trusting, loving, hoping—all of these are high-risk behavior.

When you care, you risk something. When you give, you risk. When you witness, you risk.. When you trust, you risk. When you love, you risk.. When you hope, you risk. When you have faith, you risk.

It's risky.

And when you share the gifts that God has given you instead of store them away carefully, you risk. When you see the gifts that God has given you as a burden, a sacred honor and duty to act, you risk.

Here at the end of this month of focus on God's gifts and vision for our lives, I want to challenge you to take the gifts and the opportunities that you have, and act on them. If you buried your gifts years ago, it's not too late to dig them up. Take the risk of investing yourself.

I want to tell you an old story.

Years ago in the hills of Tennessee lived a gentle old man named Seth. Seth was a music lover and an accomplished craftsman. He was a maker of dulcimers. People throughout the hills owned Seth's instruments, which were noted for the gracefulness of their design and the haunting beauty of their sound.

Seth lived alone high on a hill, somewhat isolated from the others. He had always preferred the sound of the mockingbirds to the sound of people. In fact, Seth's primary contact with the outside world were his helpers, Matthew and Jonas, two teen-aged boys

who went to Seth's cabin twice a week to help with chores and bring mail and groceries from the village in the valley below.

Matthew secured the job for the two boys. As long as he could remember, Matthew's grandmother had played one of Seth's dulcimers, one of the first that Seth had made. Matthew always enjoyed winter evenings by the fire when his grandmother would sit in her rocker, gently caressing the strings as the deep grained wood of the instrument glowed warmly with the light of the fire. Sometimes she would sing hymns; other times she would softly hum.

Over the years Matthew developed a fascination for Seth's instruments, so when he heard that the old man was looking for help he went to see him. The job was more than one boy his age could do, so Matthew talked his best friend, Jonas, into joining him—even though Jonas preferred to spend his time hunting and fishing.

Matthew always saw to it that Jonas did the outside work, which suited Jonas fine. Matthew had the task of cleaning Seth's work area, where the dulcimers were. Matthew took great care in cleaning the

completed instruments and handling the ones Seth was still forming.

The diligence with which each boy performed his assigned tasks impressed Seth from the beginning, and soon he developed a deep affection for his two helpers. The work the boys did was invaluable to him, given his age and condition, and certainly allowed him more time to craft his instruments.

But Seth was not able to pay them what he would have liked. Because he took so much time in perfecting each instrument and yet refused to ask more than a modest sum for each, Seth was not a man of wealth. These thoughts burdened the kind gentleman for a couple of years before he finally seized upon an idea that would allow him to show his appreciation to the boys.

Matthew wondered why a padlock suddenly appeared on one of Seth's cabinets. For months, each time he started to clean, the cabinet was secured, and Seth gave no indication that it ought to be opened. Matthew wondered, but had been raised to respect the privacy of others, so he never pursued the matter.

Then one day, as the boys entered the cabin, Seth met them with a sense of urgency and excitement in his voice. Quickly he led them to his work area where they spotted two beautiful matched dulcimers on a table. They were Seth's gifts to the boys.

Matthew was awed by the gesture. The beautifully intricate details of the carving had obviously taken hours of painstaking work. Each instrument shone with a dark, rich luster that highlighted the grain of the wood. Smooth to the touch, yet solidly put together, Matthew realized the dulcimers were even more beautiful than his grandmother's.

Though touched by the old man's loving gift, Jonas was not as awe-struck as Matthew. Quickly and awkwardly, he strummed the strings a couple of times, graciously thanked Seth, and left to begin his work.

After a few minutes of carefully examining his gift and softly playing part of a simple tune, Matthew stammered his heartfelt gratitude and gently set aside the dulcimer to begin his work—which was frequently interrupted that day as he found himself pausing to stare at his new treasure.

The weeks and months ahead were not easy ones for Matthew. Matthew watched as Jonas at first simply fooled around with the dulcimer he had been given, awkwardly and carelessly striking at the strings. When Jonas was finally able to play a few tunes, he would often bring the beautifully crafted instrument to school where, at recess, he would play tunes for others as they laughed and sang.

Within a year or so, Jonas's dulcimer—though the tone was still good—had lost most of its luster, the wood marred with nicks and scratches, and some of the carving detail was beginning to wear away. Matthew often found himself cringing at the way his friend handled the dulcimer.

The most difficult day came one spring afternoon when Matthew heard Jonas's father mention that Seth was coming over that night to ask Jonas if he would like to become the old man's apprentice and learn the craft of making dulcimers.

The news stunned Matthew at first. He had never considered that Seth would want to take on an apprentice. Then, when the idea began to sink in, he

felt crushed that the craftsman would have chosen Jonas over him. His love for the instruments ran deep, and he had always cared for them so well.

Matthew raced to Seth's cabin where he pored out his anguish to the old man, reminding him of the care he had given Seth's instruments and describing the condition of Jonas' dulcimer. Matthew continued by telling the craftsman how he cared for the dulcimer that was his—how he spent time each week polishing the wood, built a stand for it, and lovingly displayed it on a table at his house. He told how he played the instrument only on special occasions, always taking great care not to damage it and how he avoided taking it away from his house lest it be damaged.

The astonishment that first registered on Seth's face gradually softened to a gentle look of obvious compassion as he softly but firmly replied, *My son, I have not been unaware of your love for the dulcimers, nor have I been blind to Jonas' attitude toward them. Nevertheless, I believe Jonas has developed a greater and more appropriate appreciation for his gift.*

*You see, I build the instruments not simply for the beauty of their appearance nor simply to make a*

*living, but rather so that the music they produce can enrich the lives of others. I do take pride in my ability as a carver and finisher of wood, but that means very little if the instrument is not properly used. Jonas, because he understands this, will make a good craftsman.*

*Matthew, my son, Jonas has shared his gift with others; you have carefully preserved yours. I can teach Jonas how to care for a dulcimer, but I cannot teach you how to share your gift; that is something you must develop on your own.*

*[story by Carlton Allen in Stories of Falling Toward Grace, 11-3]*

We come to the Lord's table today. And as you receive the precious gift that our Creator has given, let this be a time of commitment for you today to take God's gifts off the shelf, out of the box, and put them to use—to learn how to share your gifts—not preserve them.

*Matthew, my son, Jonas has shared his gift with others; you have carefully preserved yours.*

The body and the blood of Christ: unmistakable evidence that the greatest good is to share the gift, not preserve it, to share your life, not preserve it, to give of your life, not hold on to it.

As you receive the gift of Christ, let this be a time of commitment to take the risk of sharing the gifts that you have been given.