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The Generosity of God
Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ “For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and **entrusted his property to them;** ¹⁵ to one he gave **five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.** Then he went away. At once ¹⁶ the one who had received the **five talents** went off and traded with them and **made five more talents.** ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the **two talents made two more talents.** ¹⁸ But the one who had received the **one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.**

¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves **came and settled accounts** with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘**Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.**’ ²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

²⁴ Then the one who had received the **one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter,** ²⁵ **so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’** ²⁶ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter?’ ²⁷ Then you ought to have **invested my money** with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and **give it to the one with the ten talents.** ²⁹ For to all those who have, **more will be given, and they will have an abundance,** but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

In the Bible Study, *The Wired Word*, on November 2nd, was a great article entitled: **What the Increased Use of Storage Units Reveals About Our Values.** Research says that up to 40% of Americans rent storage units.

There are 50,000 storage facilities in the U.S.,
and this \$50 billion market is expected to grow.

Why?

Culture journalist Jessica Furseth says it's driven by **four Ds**:

downsizing, decluttering, divorce and death.

In other words, people primarily store things for these four reasons.

And when they do, it reveals something about our VALUES.

For instance, many people store things because they are holding onto the **PAST**—
with stuff that embodies someone they used to be,
clothes they used to wear, bikes they used to ride....
or the storage facility might be full of items left from someone
who has **passed away**—and it's too hard to let go.

Other times, people store because they are hoping for a **different FUTURE**—
like gym equipment, craft supplies, kitchen tools,
musical instruments, or camping gear.

Do you have any of these things lying around? I know I do!

Sometimes items are stored because we're TOO BUSY OR TIRED to deal with it at all.

Stuff is '*never just stuff*', according to Furseth.

It always reveals something about ***our past, our future, and our hearts.***

Professional organizer Dr. Regina Lark says that
instead of storing our stuff, we should be asking ourselves
why we want these things,
and if it is ***aligned*** with our current life?

Or ask: ***what would we have to change to actually use it?***

She says sometimes the best thing we can do is, LET GO.

It reminds me of Marie Kondo and her decluttering tips from years ago—
remember her?

Her most important metric? Ask yourself: ***Does this spark joy?***

And if the answer is no, let it go.

The truth is, we are almost **ALL tempted to store or hoard.**

Whether it is out of consumerism, dreams, fears, or maybe just grief.

I wonder which of those feelings do you get trapped in?

What causes YOU to store YOUR stuff?

I think all too often, we are ALL like the man who built bigger barns in Luke 12.

And at first glance, he looks smart—saving for the future.

But if you read the story, the man is focused entirely on himself.

And that is NOT what God wants for us.

God doesn't want us storing more and more,

selfishly acquiring, or even living in grief by holding onto things
from the past or gathering for some aspirational future.

God wants us to have

freedom from stuff, freedom from consumerism,

Freedom from hoarding.

And I think to find that freedom,

we have to dig even deeper into the reasons that we hang onto stuff.

What if we are like the man who **buried his one talent** in the ground,
instead of investing it to make more for the master?

Do we TRUST GOD or not?

I think we often do NOT trust God to provide for us.

Even if we don't think about it very much,

we might view God like the servant with one talent—

and see God as a **harsh taskmaster.**

I wonder—when YOU think of God, what comes to YOUR mind?

How do you see God?

Do you see a **harsh** man?

Or a **stingy** one?

Do you imagine someone who is **judging** you or making your life **difficult**?

It's understandable if you do---because it's a **harsh world** out there.

And sometimes we get **God confused with the world.**

But what happens if we think of God as generous? As the greatest Giver?

What if we see someone who brings us abundance?

If we see God as HARSH OR STINGY,

then our lives can become focused on trying to get what we deserve,
and what we think we need.

We can become focused on earning, finding our own security,
and the accumulation of goods and money.

Last week we heard about this in Lynne Twist's book *The Soul of Money*—

How it's like being on a hamster wheel, seeking more and more,
or playing musical chairs, hoping that we will get what WE deserve,
even if others do not get anything.

This fear causes us to ***save, store, and hoard—and ignore what others need.***

But, if we see God as GOOD AND GENEROUS,

as THE GIVER of all abundance,

then our lives can be about ***joining in that generous kingdom of God!***

We can be like the person with five talents, going out and making five more!

***If we see God as generous, we start to understand that we are BLESSED by God,
and invited to be a part of BLESSING other people.***

We want to use what God has given us---to share and help, to love.

Kind of like the opportunity we have right now,

to help feed food pantry clients,

Or help those displaced by the fire this week in Matawan.

If we live in a world of ABUNDANCE AND GRACE,

we can let go of selfish acquisition,

and focus on the ***needs of people who are hurting—***

all because God is a good and generous giver, and God will provide what we need,
so that we can give!

God gives us ENOUGH, enough to share, enough to give.

If God is generous, then our lives can be ***open-handed,***

And ***overflowing,*** and we can ***bear the fruit*** of goodness and generosity,

just like our gracious God.

The truth is, our God IS a giver. The GREATEST GIVER.

It's the identity of our loving, living God.

God has given us ***everything***.

Rev. Preston Sharpe, in his *Art of Preaching* commentary,

says that the church should proclaim ***the God "who gifted himself!"***

I love that—the God who gifted himself.

That's the God we know and love.

That's the God who ***gave his only Son***, Jesus Christ, for us.

The God who gave himself to us in the ***incarnation***—the Word become flesh.

When we trust and believe in THAT God,

When we understand who God really IS,

Then we ***gladly invest what's been entrusted to us***----

and then our gracious God says, *well done, good and trustworthy servant, enter into the joy of the master!*

Don't we ***ALL want to hear*** those words?

A few weeks ago we read in Hebrews 12,

about the importance of ***keeping our eyes on Jesus***—

the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,

who leads us as we run the race of faith,

laying aside the weight and the sin that can hold us back.

Do we have our eyes on Jesus?

Do we think about Jesus, when it comes to our time, talent, and money?

So often we read this story and think about giving time and talent.

Which IS so important.

We need to give our time and talent to God—by serving, helping, and loving.

It might be through teaching, or leading a class, singing, or mentoring a young person, it might be through volunteering in any different capacity.

Whatever we can do—OUR time and talents support the body of Christ in our community and our world.

It's our way of giving back!

We also are called to give our financial resources to God,
And those resources help us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

And, there's even MORE to this story, just like every parable that Jesus told.
There is the issue of INVESTING.

Kind of like storing “eternal treasures” instead of earthly ones.

We are called to INVEST IN PEOPLE---which we do by sharing time and talent.

And, by giving our **money**—to do things like supporting education, or feeding people, mentoring, or creating opportunities for people to grow.

When we invest in people, that is an **eternal treasure**.

But our hearts are TRULY turned to this kind of investing,

When we know that God INVESTS in us.

When we trust in the goodness of God.

When we believe in the generosity of God.

Our God gives us EVERYTHING---and entrusts it to our stewardship and care.

Every **penny** that we have, all that we have earned, or inherited,
or simply received—it's **ALL a gift from God**.

We might feel like we earned it, but that was by the grace of God too!

God gives us creation--the beauty, sunshine, fall leaves, the earth—to care for.

God gives us the **animals and creatures** of the earth—to care for.

God gives us our **friends and families**--to care for.

God gives us the **least of these**—to care for.

And God gives us the **church**---that we might care for it.

Our God is a GIVER. It's WHO GOD IS.

God is not a harsh task-master, or a stingy man in heaven.

God is a generous and loving giver!

And that's who WE ARE CALLED TO BE!

We have been ENTRUSTED with so much,

may we care for all of it, in the same way that God lovingly cares for us.

That is the Good News of the Gospel today.

And for those good gifts, all God's people can say together, Amen.