

God's Economics Matthew 25:14-29
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV – 22nd Sunday after Pentecost (November 6,) 2011

Matthew 15:14-29 14“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20Then 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.' 21His 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.' 22And 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.' 23His 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.' 24Then 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 seed; 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26But 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? 27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29For 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.

There's a **formula** with which we have grown accustomed **for storytelling**: there is a **group of people (three or more) who attempt to do something. All of them get it wrong, until the underdog finally comes along and gets it right.**

Two wicked stepsisters try to put their foot into the glass slipper held by Prince Charming. But the foot of each will not fit; only the foot of Cinderella is the perfect fit, qualifying her for marriage to the Prince, and happiness for them both for the rest of their lives.

And there's a similar story in the First Testament:

1 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." [So Samuel went and gathered together the sons of Jesse.] 6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his

appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” 11 Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. (1 Samuel 16:1,6-13a)

And we know of how that story got lived out in the legend of **King Arthur**, during his childhood as a squire to the knight and his brothers. There was this sword in the stone, which legend said only the new king could pull out. Wart (as young Arthur was called) was the only one who could pull the sword out of the stone, after many before him tried.

It’s a time worn, successful formula for storytelling. But **Jesus** – *as He seemed to enjoy doing* – **upset the applecart and told HIS STORY following a different formula, in today’s Gospel lesson.**

Here there are three “contestants.” Two are blessed more than the third – a clear underdog. They had five and two talents. (The talent was recognized as a sum of money.) The third, with only one talent, was clearly the underdog.

As the telling of their escapades unfolds, the first two are successful. The third, the stereotypical underdog and winner, is unsuccessful. He fails, **although it seems that his conduct is really innocuous.**

But, in the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN – these stories from last week, today, and next week – **things aren’t done the way to which we traditionally have grown accustomed. What we might think is INNOCUOUS or even PRUDENT turns out to be very, very foolish in GOD’S ECONOMICS.**

The loser – the “underdog” – has done something that is not at all innocuous.

Let me diverge from the story’s main point, for just one second to point out a smaller point of the parable – but one important enough to interrupt and point out:

In this story about how things are in the Kingdom of Heaven, we ought notice that there is not competition between the three talent bearing characters. The competition (for lack of a better word) is of each with himself, not against the other. The fact that the one is gifted with ten talents does not make him any more or less than the one who has five talents. Both are rewarded with this gold medal: *‘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.’*

The third character had just as much chance of receiving this same reward, as did the first and second. No first, second, third places in the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s PASS / FAIL. You are either IN or you are OUT.

And so what is the reward? In this parable of Jesus, it is expressed like this:

ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER.

This upside down parable teaches us about the ECONOMICS OF GOD, which are different from the traditional economics with which the first century Palestinian Jew and the 21st century West Virginia Christian are familiar.

In GOD’S ECONOMY, there are certain spiritual laws which control how God and humans work together. **These spiritual laws might be thought of like laws of nature, e.g. the LAW OF GRAVITY. If I let go of this pen that I hold in my hand, what’s going to happen to it? It will fall. That’s not an expression of judgment; it’s just the way things work.**

So, too, the spiritual laws in God’s economy. When people know the law and work with the law, they get good results.

God's laws emanate from God's Nature. **The nature of God is LOVE and SELF-GIVING.** So when the Spirit of God enters into partnership with us then we, too, are LOVE and SELF-GIVING.

(Or, you might think of it as when we act in the manner in which we are designed to act: IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, then “round peg into round hole” and good things happen.)

So when someone enters into partnership with the Spirit of God, one will give things away: giving, selling, trading – NEVER HOARDING.

When we become aware of the Spirit of God within us and begin to give away the Spirit of God, we become more aware of the Spirit of God, and have more of it. We give the more away, and the more we receive. It's an upward cycle of giving and receiving. The more we give, the more we receive. And in so doing we receive THE JOY OF OUR MASTER.

The third character in Jesus' story does the one thing that is prohibited in God's Economics. He HOARDS it. He doesn't give, sell, nor trade it. He hoards it.

He claims that he does it out of fear. But that doesn't matter. In fact, it really describes what is said later in 1 John **LOVE CASTS OUT ALL FEAR.**

- ⌘ **How can you tell that somebody does not have the Spirit of God within them?**
- ⌘ **How can you tell that someone does not know the Joy of the Lord?**
- ⌘ **Simple. Look at their habits. Do they HOARD or do they GIVE.**

In God's Economy, it's simple. Hoard and Lose. Give and Win.

You're not in competition with others. You either GET IT or LOSE IT.

One last story might help us understand.

Once upon a time a woman came to the Teacher and asked, **“What is the ONE TRUE RELIGION?”** The Teacher thought for a moment and said, **“Let me tell you a story:**

“Once there was an old man who had a magic ring. The owner of that ring received the gifts of grace, kindness and generosity. As the old man approached death, each of his three sons asked him individually to bequeath the magic ring to them. He promised it to each of them.

“Was the old man wise or foolish to do such a thing? You decide.

“After promising the ring to each of his sons, the old man sent for the finest jeweler in the land, and asked him to make two exact replicas of the magic ring. The jeweler was very good, and did what he was commissioned to do. The rings were identical in appearance. But only one was magic.

“Then, before he died, the old man gave each of his sons one of the rings. Inevitably, as life will have it, all three sons found out about the ring owned by his two brothers. So they went to the local judge to determine who had the real Magic Ring. The judge, being a wise and observant man, examined all three of the rings, and found them to be identical. When he heard about the Magic Ring’s qualities, he said: “I will tell you who has the real Magic Ring, when I see how you each live your life. That is the telling.”

“So each son left the Judge’s court and lived his life as though the ring he owned was the magic one.

“So,” the Teacher said to the woman asking him which is the one true Religion, “the religions of the world are like the brothers in the story. The moment their members quit living with grace, kindness, and generosity, we will know that their religions is not the one God gave the world.”

So, too, I tell you: How do we know who among us knows the JOY OF OUR MASTER? This will be quite evident by how we act.

⊕ **Do we act out of fear?**

⊕ **Are we hoarders?**

⊕ **Do we act as though the gifts, talents, and resources are our own, of our own doing?**

Or,

⊕ **are we generous and giving –**

⊕ **sharing, giving, investing God’s gifts,**

⊕ **as God gave them to us?**

In an economy like we are experiencing today, **some people are acting as if Wall Street is the Lord God. They are allowing the world to shape their spirit, and they are becoming fearful and hoarding.** But there are **others**, who **KNOW THE JOY OF THE LORD. WE CAN TELL WHICH IS WHICH, by seeing how they act.** They engage in the Commerce of God, according to the Rules of God's Economy.

We will all come to know the lesson of God's Economy – either in the teaching of today's Gospel lesson, or in the realization of God's Economy in our lives, as surely as the players in today's story did.

Learning by hearing or by experiencing.

As Jesus liked to say: **May those who have ears, hear.**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.