

Homily for 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - November 16, 2008

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Matthew 25:14-30

As tempting as it might be to interpret this parable in light of the current economic crisis, Jesus' words here are simply not about the stock market, or investment strategy or clever entrepreneurship – even if the imagery he uses is that of return on funds loaned. And if you think otherwise, just look at what happens to the foolish one of the three servants: he's thrown outside into the darkness, where there is wailing - and grinding of teeth:
- no bailout for this guy!

You don't have to be a scripture scholar to figure out the message here: use your gifts, whatever they are, no matter how large or small they might be use your gifts and use them wisely.

The Church, in choosing today's scriptures, pairs the woman in Proverbs with the three servants in the gospel. We heard that she's a faithful wife, that she weaves her own cloth and is generous to the poor.

But that's only a snippet from the [31st chapter of Proverbs](#) where we also learn that this same woman:

- secures provisions for her family
- sets a good table and is a good cook
- works late into the night and gets up early every day
- finds fertile land to purchase and plants a vineyard
- is strong and has sturdy arms (apparently she works out!)
- is successful in business
- reaches out to the needy
- weaves her own blankets
- makes warm clothes for her children in the winter
- dresses herself in fine linen and beautiful colors
- makes clothes and belts and sells them to local merchants
- is known for her strength and dignity
- laughs at tomorrow's problems
- speaks with wisdom and offers kindly counsel
- keeps her house in order
- is careful about what she eats
- and is never idle.

You go, girl!

But what we need to see in this woman is not her success or how many talents she was – that’s not the point. The point is simply that she used what she had and she used it well - and she used it for others.

So, I need to ask myself, you need to ask yourselves,
“What do I have to work with?”
Am I working with everything I have?
And, for whom am I working?”

These scriptures are about more than financial and personal success: they are about the fruitful harvest of whatever I have to offer and not for financial gain or personal acclaim but for the needs and service of others.

Sometimes we *are* like that third servant.
We may not dig a hole in the ground to bury our gifts, but we might:
- pack up our gifts in a box that we label
“my puny gifts, won’t make a difference, not worth anyone’s notice;”
- or we might stuff them in a package labeled, “Return to Sender,” saying
“I don’t like the gifts I have; they’re not the ones I wanted;
I wanted *her* gifts; I like the gifts *he* got better!”
- maybe my gifts are buried in a busy schedule with the notation:
“Sorry – no time to offer my gifts – much too busy about other things!”
- or my gifts might be hidden in my fear that others find that I have them, because if they knew – they might expect me to share them;
- or perhaps I blindfold myself, refusing to acknowledge any gifts, convinced that I just didn’t get any!

Sometimes we subject ourselves to such prejudice and judgment;
sometimes others teach us to deny or bury our gifts;
sadly, sometimes the Church fails to recognize the gifts of its members.

Gifts?

My gift might be time, treasure or talent;
my gift might be warmth, compassion, or humor;
my gift might be a smile, a word or a gesture;
my gift might be my art, my strong arm or my skill;
my gift might be a friendly gesture or a lifetime of love;
my gift might be a token of appreciation or an act of sacrifice;
my gift might be support, encouragement or consolation;
my gift might be spare minute, a day's help or a lifetime commitment;
my gift might be phone call, a letter or a visit;
my gift might be a dollar or a hundred thousand dollars or a prayer;
my gift might be a forgiving heart, an understanding ear,
truth on my lips or a helping hand;

my gift might be volunteering, joining – or just showing up...

I think we're probably getting the message.

The woman in Proverbs saw what she had to offer - and offered it and in doing so, everyone around her found their lives enriched. This parable of the talents comes in the 25th chapter of Matthew with two other parables about how our lives will be measured at the end: by how we used everything we were given - for others.

Wherever we find ourselves in these scriptures, it's not too late! Even if our gifts were long ago stashed away, it's never too late to unpack them and find ways to offer them now.

After the 25th chapter of Matthew, the remainder of his gospel is the story of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. The Cross shows us how willing Jesus was to offer *everything* he had in service of the needs of others – in service my needs and yours.

And at this altar, across this table, he continues to offer himself for us -and to us- in the Eucharist.

May the bread and cup of this sacrament nourish us to offer what we've been given – for others...

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*