



## **“What is this parable saying”**

Rev Linda Murphy  
Year A, Ordinary 33  
Matthew 25:14-30  
19 November 2023

This parable makes me uncomfortable. Making 100% profit usually means someone has gone without or been disadvantaged for that profit to be achieved.

This parable is a descriptive one of how the system works when an absentee landlord “gives” money to servants, only to demand a healthy return. It is a descriptive parable of someone who refused to participate in that process, in a situation where the absentee landowners and their servants were the primary interface between Jewish peasantry and the Roman Empire. That servant deemed “lazy” and unfaithful by the Empire pays an awful price for refusing to play along.

Now, if we read this parable in context, the people who Jesus would have been talking to while telling this parable would have been the peasants of Palestine. When he mentioned a wealthy landowner, and the talent, an amount worth many millions of dollars by today’s standards, it would have been very clear to the peasants who the wealthy person represented. The listeners would have known straight away that Jesus was speaking about those who owned the land, the ones who would raise taxes, the ones with the power to alter the laws and put constraints on their freedom and keep them in a state of poverty.

When Jesus said that he put his three top servants in charge, the people would have also known what that meant; that the three men would have orders to get the money multiplied in any way they saw fit, including putting more pressure on the peasants. The system was corrupt, and the rich continued to get richer and the poor poorer. Seems things haven't changed very much in two thousand years.

So, when the absentee landowner returns, the first two servants get rewarded for doing what they were charged to do...make money. The third servant, because he hid his talent, gets punished, he was cast out. But it is the third servant, who might be the hero. Because he saw the landowner for who he really was. He saw what he was expected to do, and realised that in order to do it, he would have to buy into and perpetuate a corrupt system. He refused and challenged the landowner.

In verse 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?"*

The third servant was willing to risk being poor himself, to have to live among the oppressed, in order to not participate in the corruption. It was his ultimate sacrifice for the people.

Jesus is giving the people an illustration of how the world is and that sometimes we must be willing to risk and sacrifice our own comfort for the greater good sometimes we must take even one step against the system, not to accept the status quo.

This parable of the "talents" is a story of investments- wise or not wise. It is also a story of world views that of scarcity and that of abundance. When we talk about a theology of abundance, we are not talking about a prosperity doctrine. It is a doctrine of expectation that God is present and active in

the world and that we need not fear the world around us. It is fear that distracts us from living with expectant hearts. It is fear that keeps us from loving our neighbour. It is fear that keeps us from dreaming dreams with God. It is fear that leads us to hoard and bury our resources in the ground rather than investing them in the work of God.

Te Tapui Atawhai, Auckland City Mission operates on generous donations from the people and businesses of Auckland. We have a Fundraising and Reputation team who work tirelessly engaging with Auckland's businesses and community groups to raise funds so we can continue our mission with the disadvantaged and disenfranchised of our city. This team is responsible for growing public awareness about the reality of poverty, food insecurity and homelessness in Tāmaki Makarau, Auckland and inspiring our community to stand with those in need. They are responsible for raising money to fund our services and making sure our supporters feel loved and appreciated. Without investing these donations Homeground would not have been realised and our mahi would not continue. Nevertheless, our mahi does continue we still have hundreds of hungry whanau who often are working in low paying work and just don't have enough after rent to put kai on the table.

This week I was talking with one of our whanau who was very reluctant to attend an outpatient appointment at Greenlane Clinical Centre. He explained that the journey there and back involved catching four buses at the cost of \$16.00. No wonder it is difficult to get our whanau to attend their outpatient appointments. When you only have about \$80 for food if you are lucky after rent and utility costs the bus fare to Greenlane is not an option.

Fortunately, we can ensure that our whanau attend their outpatient by taking them or arranging taxis to transport

them however this funding is limited. So, this is an area where we need more funding, and it seems we may have a new source to help with this. Te Whatu Ora are being much more helpful in this area. I do hope when we finally have a government this will not change my fingers are crossed.

We serve a God who has blessed us with talents and the only risk involved is in not using those gifts at all. There is no fear of making a mistake because when you have experienced God's love, you realise that love is perfect and perfect love casts out all fear.

So perhaps this isn't such an uncomfortable parable but one that challenges us to use our talents and invest them in achieving the message Jesus has given us to love one another and share our prosperity with each other.