

Lord, make these words to be your Word, that our hearts might become your Heart.

I was older than I should have been when I learned a basic fact of finance:
Not investing money means losing money.
Money just sitting in a bank account will lose value.
I thought I was a cautious investor; turns out I was a clueless investor.
To not choose is to lose,
And that is also true in that spiritual realm Jesus called "the Kingdom of God.

Our minds cannot grasp the mystery of that pace which is here and now,
but not as visible as what we call reality, so Jesus conveyed
how that realm works through words and images and stories.
Lots of stories. He told stories with recognizable settings and people –
sheepfolds, vineyards, bread-baking, house-cleaning, seed planting;
he told of families, crime victims, bridesmaids.
And he set 15 out of 36 parables in the world of finance and management.
That's almost half. He knew that we understand the language of money;
Commerce, business, investment are a language everyone speaks.

Like last week's parable, today's story illuminates Jesus' warning:
"Keep awake... for you know not the day nor the hour"
– of the final judgment, that is. What some might call the day of accounting.
This story could happen now. Say a Vice President at a big investment firm
pulls in three of his account managers and says, "Here's your big chance.
I'm going to check on our Asian business – here're some mutual funds to manage.
See what you can do with them. And when I get back, I expect results!"

The first one gets a big fund with big investors – she has about \$5 million to play with.
No one knows exactly what a *minas*, translated as a "talent," was, but it was a lot.
She has an aggressive investment strategy and it pays off – she doubles the money.
The second one has about \$2 million to invest – and he does well too.
He's done his research, and he's got \$4 million to present when the VP gets back.
He's happy. The clients are happy. Who's not happy?
Well, there was this third one, so scared by the prospect of blowing it,
losing his job, that he figures he'd better play it safe.

As long as he doesn't lose any of the money entrusted to him, he should be fine, right? He's got a big mortgage to maintain, tuitions to save for.

He just drops his \$1 million in the firm's money market to keep it safe.

He doesn't lose, but he doesn't gain. And his boss is NOT happy.

"You miserable so-and-so – you were afraid of me? Think I'm not always fair?"

Well, the least you could have done is put it in a CD and gotten a few measly points of interest on it. You want to see how fair I am? Clean out your desk and report to the mailroom, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!"

But the first two? "Great job! I'm going to let you manage those funds, fulltime. and put you in charge of some of our new business.

Now come on up to the executive dining room and share my joy!" (This must have happened in in the days when people actually worked in office buildings...)

For everyone who has will be given more, and she will have an abundance.

Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

This story tells us that the Life of God involves investment –

how we put the resources we have been given into play for growth.

That includes our money, yes, and our gifts, our time, our relationships,

our circumstances – the whole complex of inter-connected things and people we call our LIFE. The way we are to live is fully invested. All in. Lean in, go all in.

We celebrate a magnificent story to tell of a God who goes all in for us,

of a Son who went all in for us, holding nothing back.

Jesus is the five-talent guy and in him we can be too.

We who bear his name are invited to invest ourselves fully too.

We're in the middle of pledge season; we are all being invited

to invest in what God is doing through us at the Christ Churches.

This parable is NOT about investing in our church, though.

It's about getting into the game, into the action, off the bench, off the fence.

It's about investing in God's Way of Love, restoring all of creation to wholeness.

God wants to do that through us, in our unique ways, in our unique circumstances.

That's our job, folks – what we are invited to invest in:

carrying God's contagious love to people who are different from us.

Our job is not to raise a budget or "keep this church going."

This church is a tool, a mechanism by which we go about God's mission.

We pay a priest to help us make Christ known, to lead us in our ministries.

We keep this building to make Christ known – and we’ve just made a big investment in technology that connects us to people who aren’t safe in this building at the moment, and to many who don’t even live there. I pledge and try to pledge generously as a sign of my investment in what we’re doing with God in this place, as a sign of my investment in inviting others to encounter Christ here and where we take him in the world. I hope you will join me. Our pledge card should be not a duty, but a love letter – a love letter back to the One who loves us so much he’s all-in for us, the One who says, “Well done! Enter into the joy of your master.”

God is active all around us, here in this church, out in our communities. We take what we’ve been given – and all that we have is gift – and we invest in God’s huge and wonderful enterprise of justice and wholeness. You want a vibrant faith? Invest in those spiritual practices we talk about. Do you have passion to transform structures of injustice? Invest your time. Maybe what you have a lot of right now is sorrow. Invest that in something that will bring joy to someone ... I’m pretty sure that joy will wash back onto you.

Investment is always an act of faith. We can’t be sure of our return, but we invest in things we believe in. Look at this third servant, the one who failed so miserably by doing nothing. Why does this “master,” or Jesus, have such animosity toward him? Because he’s taken what he’s been given, and did nothing to make it grow. He is governed by fear, not faith. Fear is a familiar feeling to me these days. Fear is a natural part of life. But Jesus does not call us to a natural life – Jesus calls us to a super-natural life. And, as my sister noted, whenever we give in to fear, we increase its footprint in the world. Each time we give into faith and love, we increase that in the world.

Faith and fear cannot occupy the same space. However much room we allow for fear, there’s that much less room for faith. And however much room we allow for faith, there’s that much less for fear. “There is no fear in love,” we read in I John, “But perfect love casts out fear.” I read an interview with the actor John Heard, and he said something that stuck with me: “When you’re living by fear, you’re always looking for security. When you’re living by faith, you’re always looking for freedom.”

Those first two servants exercised freedom in the trust of their master.

God doesn't want us to be scared into putting our resources into play

God wants us to be loved into it. Of all the currencies in the Kingdom of God – which includes dollars – the greatest currency is love.

Love absolutely multiplies when it is given away, and shrinks when it is withheld.

The one who loves much is given more to love. Jesus was talking about love when he said, *For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what she has will be taken from her.*

Love will not run out, or fail us. Love grows when it is given away.

The more we put our abundance to work for good, the more we have to play with.

God has invested in each one of us, and God wants the investment to grow.

God is invested in our growing into the fullness of who we are, who God already sees when God looks at us.

Love is where all of this begins, this enormous, crazy, over-the-top Love in which we were formed and nurtured.

That's what we celebrate here when we come together – a love that desires our growth. That's where all our investments start, with soaking in that love.

When our dollars, our time, our things we give away are connected to the love we experience from God, we are released to love people we don't even know, to love the unlovable, forgive the unforgivable, heal what looks too broken. Even the challenges facing this country.

And our love – when it's God's love – will never, ever run out.

No matter how many risks we take to spread it around, we'll just end up with more of it, until the world is just swimming in love.

The love is already here. The joy is now. Are you all in?

Amen.

Matthew 25:14-29

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The one who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the one who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five.

'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' " His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

"Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

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