

Risks- How do you see God?  
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**Matthew 25:14-30**

<sup>14</sup>“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>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.’ <sup>21</sup>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.’ <sup>22</sup>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.’ <sup>23</sup>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.’ <sup>24</sup>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 seed; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup>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? <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Who do you say that I am?<sup>1</sup>

It’s the question Moses asks God when he stands at the burning bush. “When I have to go tell Pharaoh he should give up his entire workforce because you said so, who am I going to tell him is issuing this command?”

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<sup>1</sup> While not directly quoted, I have relied heavily on these articles for today’s sermon:  
<http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2017/11/reaping-and-weeping.html>  
<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/matt25x14.htm>  
<http://www.davidlose.net/2014/11/pentecost-23-a/>  
<http://www.theologicalstew.com/two-sides-to-every-story.html>  
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/living-word/november-19-ordinary-33a-matthew-2514-30>

<sup>14</sup>God said to Moses [we're told in the book of Exodus, chapter 3], "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup>God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Who do you say that I am?

Psalm 102 gives us this answer: "Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end."

And then in Luke, Chapter 9

<sup>18</sup>Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" <sup>19</sup>They answered, "John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen." <sup>20</sup>He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."

Why does who we say God is matter?

It matters because it's the key to understanding today's text, and finding in it some good news.

Is God vindictive and angry—ready to punish and wreak havoc? Reaping where his has not sown? If so, then you might feel justified in ignoring the call to share and nurture the talents you have been given, and simply burying what you have, hoping not to lose any more.

Or... is our God a God of grace and hope. Of redemption and possibility. A God who can find a way where there is no way. If you know this God, then what might you want to do with the good news this God shares?

My friend and colleague Pen Peery told a story a few years ago about a mission trip he took with his church to Malawi, a trip that taught him about how we view God and what that means. He wrote: <sup>2</sup>

We spent our time in Malawi working with an organization called The Ministry of Hope – a Presbyterian mission for children who are orphans (mainly from HIV/AIDS). We did the typical things you do on mission trips with youth....In and through this, of course, was the true reason for our coming – the relationships that were created and the exposure that the 18 of us Americans had to the reality of much of the world.

The director of the shelter where we worked during our time in Malawi was a man named William. He was a kind man; soft spoken and gentle with the 300 orphans he looked over through the Ministry of Hope. He was a man of incredible

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<sup>2</sup> Shared by The Rev. Dr. Pendelton Peery at the meeting of The Well lectionary study group in 2008 in Austin, Texas. Used with permission.

faith – faith that was evident in the way he carried himself and interacted with those around him.

William had been the coordinator at the Mponela shelter for three years. He had not been to college – partly because he lacked the funds, but mainly because he followed God’s call to active ministry that took a priority over everything else. He embodied the servant leader model of Jesus by devoting his life to being with those who are the poor and orphaned.

Not trying to fix them – but being with them in the way he shared the gospel.

On our second day at the center, William invited me into his office. We talked about our joys and our challenges in ministry – and in that conversation, I learned that in 1995 William followed God’s call to go from Malawi to Rwanda to witness to the power of the resurrection in the wake of the genocide of 1994. He went by himself.

For one full year he lived among the people of Rwanda – people whose faith had been devastated – in order to assure them of the good news in Jesus Christ. William felt called – and so he went. Not with an organization – but just because he knew that the gospel needed to be present. For one full year, William listened to stories too terrible to mention – of mutilation and hatred and death. He sat with people in their pain and in their anger toward a God who could let such pain happen. He listened – not with an agenda – but so he could bear witness to the gospel...not by his words but through his presence.

What does it take to bear witness to the Gospel like that? I believe it takes trusting that God IS like that. God is like the generous master the first two servants proclaim him to be. God is the one who listens to the anger of hurt and devastation. Who sends someone to walk along side. Who remains hopeful.

And that is the gospel itself, what this parable is really about. Not money. Not talents. Bu the good news, and what are we going to do with it while we wait for Jesus to come back?

Will we bury the good news and hope nobody notices it in our lives?

Or will we witness in our lives and actions, our words and deeds, that our God is a God of grace, who believes in second and thirty-second chances. Who created us in the image of God. We are created in God’s image. You. Me. All of us.!

Today, you are all being asked to turn in a commitment card. A pledge card. For some of you, it will have your financial pledge for the next year. Others have already turned yours in, and you are being asked to write a hope or a prayer on the back. Others may be visisting, or not ready to make a pledge.

These cards are helpful to the church in planning, but that’s not why we do them.

That’s not why we have stewardship season at all.

We do this because how we live our lives says something about what we believe about and see in God?

We live into that belief through our giving and our sharing. Our trusting in God's abundance.

And you can go to Rwanda to do that.

But you can also do it here.

As Fred Craddock, a well-known preacher and scholar, says, "We tend to think of our life as a thousand dollar bill. We lay it on a table and say, 'Lord, this is my life. Take all of it.' And instead the Lord has us take that bill to the bank and exchange it for quarters. And so the life of discipleship is spent in small acts of love, 25 cents at a time."<sup>3</sup>

Today is one of those days when we put our 25 cents on the counter. For some of you it is a payment that shows where you are. For others it is a goal, set before you of where you'd like to be.

Pen Peery, when he reflected on his encounter with William, wrote: "William helps me to remember that, at a foundational level, stewardship is an expression of loyalty to the one triune God that demands our total response. The true and triune God is more generous than we can imagine. God expects more of us than we dare to imagine. To be a faithful steward is to stake our life on the claims of the gospel that point toward this generous God – and to risk what the consequences of such radical loyalty may be. A life lived like that is one that elicits joy from the One who claims us and who loves us enough to entrust us with the keys to the kingdom."

God loves us just that much. Just that much and more.  
So may we respond. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Fred Craddock, in an address to pastors, cited in *Leadership* (Fall 1984), 47