

**Text:** [Matthew 25:14-30 \(CEB\)](#)

**Date:** November 19, 2023

**Title:** Doing What We Can: Living in These Times, Week 2

**Theme:** God calls us to invest what we've been given to help heal the world.

## 1

Some people like to take risks  
They love an adventure and seem to have no fear  
So they will sign up to go sky-diving  
They'll move across the country to a place where they don't have family or friends  
They'll strike up a conversation with anyone – even someone famous they run into on the street

Other people are more cautious  
They always stay inside the airplane  
They put down roots and stay in the same place their whole lives  
They're careful about opening their mouth in public because they don't want to say the wrong thing  
They ask themselves: "What's the worst that could happen?"  
And then they plan against those contingencies

Those who take risks always live with the possibility that something might go badly – maybe horrifically so  
But those who are cautious always live with the possibility that they may be missing out on something – maybe even something amazing

Today's story is the story of two different kinds of people  
Those who take a risk that pays off  
And those who play it so safe that they come to regret it

As we get started, I want you to think about which of these types you most identify with  
>>Are you a risk-taker or a risk-avoider?

## 2

Last week, I introduced this mini-series as two sermons about living in a world that seems to be going downhill fast  
When it's easy to worry about the end of the world as we know it – for a hundred different reasons

I also shared that people have been feeling that way for a long time  
And that the stories Jesus tells in the tail end of Matthew's gospel offer us proof  
Because Matthew 25 is all about how we should be living as the Church anticipates Christ's return

Last week we spoke about how we can be WELL-prepared –  
not OVER-prepared with worry and fear,  
not UNDER-prepared with a kind of ignorance or laziness,  
But WELL-prepared - with patience and the knowledge that God has given us important work to do while we wait

## 3

And today's scripture builds on that idea  
It's probably a familiar story – one we traditionally have called the “Parable of the Talents”  
It's about three men entrusted with fairly large sums of money – 5, 2, and 1 talent-weight of gold or silver, to be precise  
The particular version of the Bible we read from kind of obscures how much we mean – because it just talks about “valuable coins”  
I suppose because they don't want to contaminate our interpretation by talking about “talents” – knowing that “talent” has a totally different meaning in modern English

But I feel like it's important to note that a talent was about 15 years' wages for an average worker  
So not a small amount of money – maybe the equivalent of \$750,000 or more  
And for the one who received five talents, multiple millions of dollars

Well, the first two take their money and put it to work  
They clearly aren't risk-averse  
And it pays off: they succeed in doubling their boss's investment  
The boss is pleased and grateful

They stand in contrast to the third  
Who, when the boss returns and asks how things went, hands him a dirty  
sack filled with his silver and says: "It's safe. I buried it."

It's true that burying money was commonplace in ancient Israel  
In a day before banks, and with foreign armies constantly invading the land,  
what else could you do?  
That's the action of the risk-averse investor: protect the principal  
Don't lose money

This third servant is unusually candid in sharing the reason why he took  
this approach:

"I knew you were kind of a jerk, so I didn't want to run the risk of  
disappointing you."

Well, that's not EXACTLY what he said, but pretty much

#### 4

At this point, I want you to take a minute to think about how you answered  
me earlier when I asked how you saw yourself

As a risk-taker or a risk-avoider?

Where do you see yourself in this story?

Would you have been willing to take the risk of investing the money,  
knowing that it wasn't a sure thing,

Or would you have just done everything you could to keep it safe?

As it turns out, the less-risky strategy didn't go exactly as planned  
Because the boss WAS disappointed

He sure didn't hand over \$750K expecting his guy to bury it

And he turned the man's own admission against him

"So, if you knew I was going to be a jerk, why didn't you try and do  
something with the money I gave you?"

This might be a good time to point out that while the boss gave larger or smaller amounts of money to each based on their abilities  
He wasn't afraid to entrust ANY of them with significant responsibility  
Even the lesser amount was still a lot

## 5

I think that in this moment in history, there are two reasons why we're not making more progress on all the things that scare us the most  
And why the world continues to get worse instead of better

- 1) We don't think what we've been given is enough to make a difference, so we don't invest what we've been given  
and
- 2) We fear how others might respond to us if we fail

One of the biggest mistakes we make is in thinking that you have to have a ton of money,  
or a ton of talent – in our English sense of the word – to make a difference

If we wait for those with great wealth to save us, guess what?

They won't

Because money can fix some problems, but it can't fix the main problem  
Which is to change the way people think about and then respond to what's going on in the world around us

To tell stories that help people see themselves as part of the solution

Each of us have been given some kind of gift, talent, or resource

You may not believe that about yourself

You may see your resources as tiny – maybe not even worth considering in relation to others'

But in the story, those who succeeded were given wildly different amounts  
And yet, they didn't stand around questioning why they'd only received one or two, while someone else got five

That wasn't the point

Do you have a gift for bringing people together? That's something.

Do you have a gift for communicating an idea? That's important.

Do you possess the power of perseverance?

That may be the most important thing of all.

It's not the size or the amount of the gift you've been given, it's your  
willingness to be fully invested that matters  
No, you don't have the ability to make a difference in every issue that you  
care about  
You just don't have that much time or energy  
No one does

But can you name ONE THING that really matters to you?  
That really moves you?  
Is it homelessness?  
Is it anti-racism?  
Is it helping others recovering from addiction?  
And are you willing to fully invest in it – whatever resources and energy and  
talents you have?  
Will you invest in making a difference?

Too often, we allow ourselves to be scared away by the sheer size of  
everything we are up against  
And by our conviction that if we take the risk, and we do get invested  
And then aren't successful, that we'll just look foolish  
So we dig a hole and bury our gifts

We carry around the voice of the third servant in our heads  
We fear disappointing people  
We even fear disappointing God  
So we just don't bother taking the risk to make things better  
We figure: maybe it's enough not to make things worse  
But is a faith focused solely on not doing anything wrong really a faith that's  
worth having?

The third servant misunderstood who he worked for  
People, yes, PEOPLE can be jerks  
They will judge you for investing in something when you're not seeing  
progress  
And you may find yourself heartbroken when things aren't moving ahead  
Even to the point where you judge yourself

But know this: God does not  
God knows that real change takes time  
Sometimes generations  
So we can't be afraid to invest ourselves in work that won't be finished in  
our lifetimes  
Because that's how anything worth doing gets accomplished

The moral of the story, for me, is this:  
Whatever you care about – whatever piece of the world's hurt really moves  
your heart  
Invest in working on it – deeply and fully  
With whatever you have – however much or little you think that is

Trusting that there's more risk in burying your gifts in the ground  
And living a life that's smaller than the one God intended for you  
Than fully investing what you've been given -  
even if you don't succeed

That's how we live in these times  
Amen.

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