

God's Investment Policy

Matthew 25:14-30

Do you have an investment advisor? Even though I don't have a lot of money, I do have a lot of investment advisors! We're living in a very turbulent economic time. Of late, being an investment advisor seems to me to be one of most useless occupations I can imagine. Mostly they say, "What do you mean you're still in the stock market? Or they say, "Well, I suggest you just leave your investments as they are and just hold on!" Of course they mean, "I really don't know what you ought to do. Good luck!"

There is a parable in the Gospel of Matthew that is usually called the parable of the talents is a story that illustrates *God's investment policy*. It teaches us how to make wise investments in life and to understand just what we're investing in. The three parables in Matthew's 25th chapter illustrate the nature of God's way, God's life, and God's realm. The first story, about the wise and foolish bridesmaids, is about preparation for living well -- what we need, what skills we need to develop, and how we can be ready to live really well. The third story is the familiar one about the sheep and goats -- about seeing Christ in each other and particularly "the least of these."

The middle parable is a story of God's investment policy -- about investing in the real life that is not always visible on the surface, but is the controlling truth underlying the universe. Let's call it *heaven*. Heaven is like a wealthy entrepreneur who, having accepted a post as financial advisor to a new president, placed his assets in a trust given over to the stewardship of the trust fund. The amount of responsibility, money, reflected the abilities -- the giftedness -- of each of three of his company's vice-presidents. Let's call them stewards. The Bible calls them slaves.

At the conclusion of his term in Washington, the entrepreneur returned home and checked the quarterly dividend statements. He found that two of the stewards had invested well, but that the third had been so afraid of the volatile market that he had essentially put everything in his mattress -- not looking to grow at all. Sure enough, he had only the initial investment to return to the owner and this steward was actually feeling pretty relieved about that! The entrepreneur was not so happy with this third vice-president so he fired him, forcing him into the *utter darkness* of bankruptcy. He then gave that entire account to the first vice-president, the one who had the most to begin with.

The image of money is a symbol of all our resources including finances, talents (what we do well), passions (what we love to do even if we're not good at doing it), what we're good at (even if we don't love it), and our dreams. We might call of this our giftedness. Three people were entrusted with resources (money) from the boss, each one receiving a different amount. The first steward received the most from the boss. He fully invested his considerable giftedness, using every bit of his vast resources, and developed more -- a huge amount. Note the use of hyperbole throughout the story. This first steward invested perfectly and ended up with twice as much to return to boss! The middle-class guy, moderately-gifted, also invested all out, all he had from the boss, and doubled the original

amount to return to the boss. The first two vice-presidents invested both did every perfectly.

Now the least gifted steward received just one talent from the boss. He failed to invest that talent at all, saying to himself, "The market is just too risky!" He dug a hole in an effort to play it safe and did nothing. What were the results? There was an unhappy boss and, consequently, an unhappy servant who subsequently lost the original gift. The boss gave it to the richest steward. The poor steward also lost the trust the boss had had in him. The other two stewards might also have lost their trust in him. There was the loss of his place in the community of the other vice-presidents. That was not all. The boss lost what he might have gained from this steward's investment.

What is the meaning of this parable? It is not a story about salvation, at least not in the way we usually think of it in church. We do not need to earn the acceptance or the love of God. This parable is about being lost, however. There are many ways of being lost. You can lose your way by failing to realize the potential of your life. You can lose your reason for being by failing to invest yourself in realizing your potential. Doing nothing is less than the least and far worse than failing while trying. This story is also about abundance. There is much to be gained by investing ourselves fully. The payoff is more life and more God -- i.e. abundance!

One question to consider is how creative are you in "hiding" your potential? A second question concerns what you are willing to do to realize your possibilities and to live abundantly? Don't hide yourself. By playing it safe, you'll lose yourself when the very object is to find yourself. Invest in your life and invest yourself in life. This is God's calling for everyone -- God's invitation to the dance of life.

How we invest our time, talents, treasures, and relationships is central to the journey of faith. So, what are the best investments for us to make to offer God the best return on God's investment in us? Think about the life of faith in terms of investment. What is the best investment advice to follow? Any financial advisor will start by asking what result are you looking for? What result are you seeking with your life? That will have a lot to do with how to invest yourself, your life.

Here is my advice -- Jack's investment strategy for life: get grounded, active, and acquainted!

- Get grounded within yourself, centered inside your own skin. Be yourself. Be directed from within yourself, but not cut off from others.
- Get active. Work for justice and peace! Work together to rebuild ourselves and the world around us in the image of God's life. Let us put that life into practice in our lives.
- Get acquainted. Know yourself and who you are as clearly as you can. This is not knowledge you get from others' opinions of you, but wisdom emerging within you. Emphasize connections with other Christians! Get to know Christians in groups and denominations other than our own. Know them in a personal way. Accentuate their positives and move toward eliminating negative feelings we may have of them and

they of us. This does not mean we need to agree on everything or even on much of anything. It just means that the disagreements won't matter so much.

- Get acquainted with other religious traditions. Developing relationships with other Christians is important, but there is more work to be done. I had the opportunity to attend the recent Kansas City Tables of Faith luncheon celebrating the efforts of all faiths for cooperation and mutual respect. People of faith around the world can, and really must, work together so that nations and cultures around the world can move toward each other in a spirit of cooperation and respect. This movement is essential if the people of the world are to work together for peace, justice, and mutual acceptance.
- Resist fundamentalism in all its forms. The best way to resist fundamentalism in the world is to cooperate with people of good will. We need to resist hatred, but we cannot meet hatred with violence in an attempt to destroy evil – not with violence, but with the strength of compassion and faith in the ability of the Spirit to transform evil into good – eventually.

Let us who follow Jesus take his teachings seriously and begin to live them consistently. That is what church seeks to do when it is authentically church.

Our best investment is in the awareness of the presence of God right here and now. Perceiving the Spirit in ourselves and in others leads us to live with more freedom, less fear, and more courage. Freedom is God's gift to each of us -- free to support and celebrate those other people in our lives, free to invest ourselves in our own lives in our partnership with God.

Your life may look large or it may look small in another's eyes, but it will be the abundant life Jesus promised. It will be the fulfilled potential of the life God invested in you and me, and in the church. Let the Spirit that shown in the life of Jesus also shine in us. Amen.