

Let's Invest What We Have...The World Is Waiting!
November 13, 2011, Pentecost 22

There was a nice story in baseball from last year. A pitcher for the Detroit Tigers, Armando Galarraga, was pitching a perfect game, something that's very hard to do. It means the pitcher doesn't allow any batter to reach base: no hits, no walks, no hit batters. It's only been done 20 times in major league baseball.

Galarraga got to the last batter, in the ninth inning. The batter hit the ball, an infielder threw it to first, and the first base umpire, Jim Joyce, called him safe. That's what he saw. So that ended the pitcher's perfect game. After the game was over, the umpire looked at the TV replay, and realized the runner had been out. It should have been a perfect game, but he blew the call. That umpire sought out Armando Galarraga and said, I need to talk to you. I apologize. I blew the call.

And Galarraga said after they talked, "He probably feels more bad than me. Nobody's perfect. Everybody's human. I understand. I give the guy a lot of credit for saying, 'I need to talk to you.' You don't see an umpire tell you that after a game. I gave him a hug."

That's accountability by that umpire. That's somebody being responsible for his actions.

Jesus tells a story about accountability in our Gospel today. And the question he asks is, How are you doing with what God has given you? At some point we will all be called to be accountable for what God has loaned us. The story talks about being accountable in terms of financial returns, but really Jesus means how are we doing with everything God has sent our way- is God getting a good return on everything God has blessed us with- our talents, our spiritual gifts, our personality, our life history, and yes, our finances?

This is a story about accountability. At some point, we will stand before God, and be asked to give an accounting of our lives. And I want to be able to hear, Well done, John. You invested and multiplied your time and treasure and talents for the good of my kingdom.

Notice in this story that the master goes away on a journey, and entrusts his property to his slaves. And if God is like the master in this story, isn't it amazing that God entrusts us with all these gifts? God doesn't say, I don't trust any of you to do this work. I've got to do it all myself. No, God says, Here, I'm going to be generous and trusting with what I have. I want to be partners with you. God trusts us to be wise investors.

I am grateful for the times people have trusted me with their investments. I used to do housesitting when I was in college in California, and I house-sat some pretty nice homes and expensive pets. I'm grateful somebody trusted me enough to say, Here are the keys. Drive the cars, walk the dogs, eat the food in the freezer, we trust you!

In this story, the master trusts his slaves to do some investing for him while he is away. He wants his wealth to expand. And since this is a story about the kingdom of God, we can assume that God wants God's kingdom to expand. God wants more people to discover the hope that is in Jesus Christ. There are people we know who need to know they can be forgiven! You and I know people who are caught up in addictions, and God wants them freed! You and I know people who can't forgive and move on with their lives, and God is tugging at their hearts offering them release. God says, I want to see growth in my investments, I want to see growth in my kingdom, and I'm trusting my people to help that happen!

The master in the story gives talents to his three slaves. A talent was the largest monetary unit in the Greek currency, it was about 20 year's wages for a working man. Let's put it in modern terms. Let's say you make \$50,000 a year. In 20 years, that's a million dollars. So the first slave gets five talents, or \$5 million, the second gets \$2 million, and the last gets \$1 million. I think Jesus uses these large amounts because he wants to show how generous God is.

Why does he give them different amounts? Is that fair? Well, what does Jesus say in the story, v. 15: To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, *each according to his ability*. The Greek word for ability here is *dynamis*, which means power, each according to his power. Remember we get the word dynamite from this Greek word. So some people get more power, more "dynamite", so to speak, and some get less. We aren't all alike, are we? God has created us, God knows us, God knows what we can handle, we each have different gifts according to our abilities. Some of us can play

softball or volleyball to the glory of God, or can dance to the glory of God, some of us can do accounting, some of us get As and some get Cs, some of us have a lot of financial resources, and some of us don't, some of us do crafts, some of us can fix anything, some can administer, some can pastor (and not everybody who has the gift of pastoring, or shepherding, is ordained), some of us have tragedy in our lives and some of us have relatively uneventful histories. We each have a different package.

And we can look at ourselves and say, God, I'm disappointed in what you gave me. I'd rather be like that person over there. Look at that collection of gifts. Look at that life history. Look at those resources. Wow! Wouldn't that be something? Maybe we even say, God, then you could really use me, if I could do those things. But, alas, I'm only a one talent kind of person.

Here's the deal. God gives us the package God thinks we can handle, and says, Now be responsible for what I gave you. And I really believe that what we have is what God needs. And it's what God needs, because it's what this world needs. And nobody has it all, because God wants us working in community! God wants us to need each other! And if I look around and wish I were somebody else, who's going to take my part?

So God gives different gifts in different amounts to different people, and that's OK. God has a purpose for what you can offer financially. God has a purpose with your life history that can help somebody else.

So God doesn't ask us to be any more than we are, but God also doesn't expect us to be any *less* than we are. God will hold us accountable for the gifts we have been given. And in the story, the five talent and the two talent slave get to work, invest their talents, and double the master's money. Pretty good business venture. They invest wisely, and there is a great return on the investment.

The third slave invests the master's property in a hole in the ground, his version of putting it under his mattress. When the master comes back, he calls them forward for an accounting. How'd you do with what I gave you? The first slave reports eagerly, shows him the five talent return, and the master says, 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. The second slave shows him the return of two talents, he's also doubled his investment, and the master says the same thing,

which I believe is important in this story. The one with fewer talents gets as much praise as the one with more talents: 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.

God isn't more impressed with the flashy, multi-abled Christian than God is with the Christian with fewer abilities and resources. God is pleased when we use what we have, however much or little. These two both hear the same praise!

Then the last one comes forward, maybe cringing with his head down, and says, Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours. I didn't lose any!

Up to this point we thought this could be an allegory, right? That means everybody stands for someone in the story. The Master stands for Jesus, Christians are the servants, etc. But here's what the master says: You wicked and lazy slave. You knew, did you, that I reap where I do not sow, and gather where I do not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and upon my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

But maybe the master doesn't stand for Jesus, because Jesus never talks about personal gain. It doesn't sound like something Jesus would say. But Jesus uses the image of the master to say that he wants us to invest our lives for the sake of the kingdom, just like somebody in business who expects to receive some gain from his business dealings. The kingdom isn't supposed to be static. The kingdom is like yeast that helps the bread rise. The kingdom is like a seed that grows a hundredfold. The master expects some growth when he comes back.

Do you notice what the last slave does? He blames the master for not making an investment! I was afraid to take a risk because you are scary man! We can play the blame game, can't we? I didn't get the upbringing I should have, life hasn't been fair, people have taken advantage of me, I have this physical or emotional or mental challenge. And any or all of those things might be true! But do we let them keep us from becoming who God wants us

to be? God says, I expect a return on what I've given you, no more and no less. The world needs what God has given us to offer!

Terry Dobson tells a story about what it looks like to invest yourself in your daily life, because I believe everyday we have opportunities to invest in the kingdom with the abilities God has given us.

Terry was travelling in Japan on a commuter train passing through Tokyo one afternoon. The train car was pretty empty- a few housewives with their kids, some older folks who'd gone shopping.

At one station, the door opened, and a man staggered and cursed his way into the train car. He was big and drunk and dirty. He swung at a woman holding a baby. The blow sent her spinning into the lap of an elderly couple. They jumped up and ran to the other end of the car.

Everybody froze in fear, and Terry Dobson decided it was time to stand up and do something. He had been taking Aikido training, and he was in great physical shape, but his teacher had always told him that Aikido was about the art of reconciliation. If you try to dominate people, he said, you're already defeated.

But as Dobson's anger grew, he decided he wanted a chance to fight this man. He wanted a chance to save the innocent by destroying the guilty. So he gave this man a look of disgust, and then he blew him an insulting kiss. The man yelled, Alright! You're gonna get a lesson, and he prepared to rush at Dobson.

But just then somebody shouted, Hey! And they both turned to stare at an elderly gentleman in his 70s, wearing an immaculate kimono. C'mere and talk to me, the old man said. The drunken man answered, Why the hell should I talk to you? But he went over anyway. Watcha been drinkin? the old man asked. I been drinkin' sake, but it's none of your business. The old man said, Oh, I love sake too! Every night, my wife (she's 76 now) we warm up a little bottle of sake and take it out in the garden and we sit on an old wooden bench. We watch the sun go down, and we see how the persimmon tree is doing.

My great-grandfather planted that tree, and we worry about whether it'll recover from those ice storms we had last winter.

The big man's face began to soften. He unclenched his fists a little. Yea, I love persimmons too, he said. And the old man said, Yes, I'm sure you have a wonderful wife. And the big man said, No, my wife died, and he began to gently sob. I don't have a wife, I don't have a home, I don't have a job. I'm so ashamed of myself.

And as the train came to a stop at Dobson's station, and he walked out the door, he heard the old man say: My, my, that's a difficult predicament. Why don't you sit down and tell me about it? And when he turned for one last look, the big man was sprawled on the seat with his head in the old man's lap, and the old man was stroking his hair and listening to him tell his story.

At some point, the Master will come back and say, What did you do with what I gave you? Did you use those life experiences I gave you to help somebody else who had been down a similar road? Did you invest your time wisely in reaching out to those hard to love? Were you generous with the resources I gave you? Did you advocate for a more just society for people who live on the edges? What did you do with your citizenship?

We just finished hosting two families over the last fourteen days through the SON program. Thank you for supporting that program. We used these facilities that God gave us wisely these past two weeks. You volunteers invested your time. Thank you. When I spent the night, I talked with Dave (name changed), a father of two whose wife left him back in February for somebody else. Dave is a Christian, worships at a church in Clackamas, sends his kids to the Awana program on Wednesday night, goes to a small group Bible study on Fridays. Dave wants to start getting his associate's degree at CCC this winter, and then go to PSU for a journalism major. He'd like to use his writing skills to encourage Christians.

We invested our lives in Dave these past two weeks, and in his children, and in Jean and Jerry (names changed) and their children. I believe Jesus is pleased about that. I think I'm hearing, Well done, good and trustworthy servants. I'm proud, in a good way, to be pastor of a community that is investing our talents and abilities for the good of the kingdom. Amen.

