

## Focus on Matthew 25:14–30

### **WHAT is important to know?** — From “Exegetical Perspective,” Thomas D. Stegman, SJ

The parable sets forth positive and negative examples of conduct while awaiting the return of the Lord. Not to be overlooked is the characterization of the master: as one who bestows gifts abundantly, carefully calibrates gifts on the basis of ability, gives his slaves freedom to respond with loving responsibility, and rejoices in their fidelity. While the parable initially intimates that the talents bestowed are external to the recipients (i.e., only to be managed by them), the detail in verse 29—“to all those who *have*, more will be given, and they will *have* an abundance” (italics added)—suggests that the talents do, in fact, enrich the recipients. The parable’s ending warns of the tragedy of acting timidly in response to God’s generosity.

### **WHERE is God in these words?** — From “Theological Perspective,” Mark Douglas

We may get a more accurate reading of the master and the slave on the basis of their actions. Far from simply being harsh, the master acts generously, trusting even the third slave with the wealth of more than fifteen years’ wages. Far from reaping what he did not sow, he returns to their oversight the wealth that the first two slaves earned and, even more importantly, invites them into his joy, therein transforming his relationship with them from master/slave to something approaching equality (vv. 21, 23). This eschatological passage is about a willingness to resist fear and, like the first two slaves, to behave in risky and trusting ways, for in so doing we enter into joy upon the master’s return.

### **SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?** — From “Pastoral Perspective,” John M. Buchanan

Here Jesus invites us to be his disciples, to live our lives as fully as possible by investing them, by risking, by expanding the horizons of our responsibilities. To be his man or woman, he says, is not so much believing ideas about him as it is following him. It is to experience renewed responsibility for the use and investment of these precious lives of ours. It is to be bold and brave, to reach high and care deeply. So the parable is the invitation to the adventure of faith: the high-risk venture of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

### **NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?** — From “Homiletical Perspective,”

Lindsay P. Armstrong

Faithful living is not static; yet, like this third slave, we are good at knowing without doing. We are adept at holding on to a talent entrusted, knowing what we should do with it, but not doing so. We know what faithful living looks like, but we hesitate to live it. We bury too much goodness, time, love, treasure, and talent in the ground. Compassionately addressing inactivity, fears, and/or misconceptions about God could be a freeing treasure to offer an insecure society.

## The Venture of Discipleship

In today's parable, the property-owner commends those servants who risk venturing what has been entrusted to them. What might that mean for those who would follow Jesus today?



The third slave takes a very different approach with his money, his one talent. He digs a hole in the ground and puts all the money in the hole for safekeeping. In a time of stock-market decline, this man looks very wise. This is not a bad man. This is a prudent, careful, cautious investor. He is not about to take chances with the money. It is all there, every penny of it, when his master returns. He is proud of himself. "Here it is. All of it, safe and sound." For his efforts he is treated as harshly as anyone in the whole Bible.

The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is not to risk anything, not to care deeply and profoundly enough about anything to invest deeply, to give your heart away and in the process risk everything. The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is to play it safe, to live cautiously and prudently. Orthodox, conventional theology identifies sin as pride and egotism. However, there is an entire other lens through which to view the human condition. It is called sloth, one of the ancient church's seven deadly sins. Sloth means not caring, not loving, not rejoicing, not living up to the full potential of our humanity, playing it safe, investing nothing, being cautious and prudent, digging a hole and burying the money in the ground.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that the sin of respectable people is running from responsibility. Bonhoeffer, who was a pacifist, took his own responsibility so seriously he joined the Resistance and helped plan an assassination attempt on Hitler's life. His sense of responsibility cost him his life. How important is this personally, in terms of how we live our lives? Jesus' warning is that the outcome of playing it safe—not caring, not loving passionately, not investing yourself, not risking anything—is something akin to death, like being banished to the outer darkness.

—Excerpted from John M. Buchanan, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 310 and 312