

SERMON

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God Given Gifts

August 27, 2017

Matthew 15:14-28. Romans 12:4-9

I am sure that there are some of us here that have had to go through the experience of downsizing, or clearing out our parent's homes. Perhaps in doing so, you have wondered what to do with some of the 'treasures'. There is a story about a young woman called Jessie who helped her mother-in-law clear out some cupboards as she began to downsize. In doing so, she inherited a beautiful set of sterling silver cutlery. It was one of a kind, and Jessie knew that it was very valuable, both in monetary value, and as a family heirloom. And she decided that since it was so special and valuable, in so many ways, then she would use it every day for their meals. Her husband made no comment for a few weeks, but then after some time, he gently suggested that using his mother's best silverware every day was not a good idea. What if a piece got lost, or damaged? Jessie agreed to respect his feelings and they began to put it away in the dining room cabinet. But, in doing so, they came across a set of silverware teaspoons that they had been given as a wedding present. The teaspoons had been carefully wrapped in protective cloth, but when they unwrapped them, they saw that the spoons had become dull and lifeless. The mother's silverware, in contrast, was warm and luminous. You see, daily use had kept the silverware in good condition. So, Jessie and her husband decided to continue using the silver that had been given to them in love.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable about talents that are given to three servants by their master. Two of the servants take the talents and multiply them, returning the increased amount to their master who is very pleased with them. To both of them, he says: *"Well done, good and faithful servant!"* The third, however, buries his talent in the ground and does not make any use of it. The master becomes very angry with the servant since he has not used his gift to benefit anyone – and you can see from our wonderful acting, that he did not spare the servant – he sent him away into the darkness, with a stern warning not to come back.

Now, this parable could be taken several ways. A talent was a coin – it had monetary value. So, the story could be about how God, as the master, gives us, the servants, all the money that we need to live: enough to buy food, clothing, shelter etc. – and how God asks us to give back to others in return, rather than keeping our treasures all to our selves. But that is a sermon on tithing and stewardship that I will save for another day!

I think that the parable can also be interpreted that we each have 'talents' within ourselves - gifts and abilities. We may be born with a creative nature that enables us to draw or paint - like my husband Blair. Or we may be good with numbers and facts - like our treasurer Don. Perhaps our skill is in making cakes and the ability to creatively decorate them – like Marilyn. Or maybe we can sing, compose music, or play an instrument – or in Gibson's case – a whole variety of instruments!

There are many ways that our gifts can make the world a more beautiful, safer, and better world for all our sisters and brothers. But the gifts that we are given, need to be developed. If

we hide them, deny that we have them, or let them lie idle and bury them like the third servant did, then they are wasted. We might even forget how to use the gift that we have been given. I know that I am a bit like that when it comes to me playing trumpet; I very occasionally dust off my trumpet and play it – secretly when I am alone! But, hiding our gifts is a bit like the hidden silver spoons, the gifts might lose their lustre if they are not used. Certainly, my trumpet playing isn't as good as it used to be!

Now I know that we may be reluctant to offer our gifts; perhaps we are like the third servant who was afraid that he just wasn't good enough. Maybe you're thinking about joining the choir, but you think that your voice just isn't good enough. If that is you, then perhaps like the third servant, you are guilty of not developing and sharing your skills.

And perhaps, like the third servant, you just don't realize what you have been given! Maybe your gift has been buried for such a long while. But I want you now, to turn to the person beside you, or in front of you, or behind you, and tell them about a special gift, a talent that you have. Something that you are good at – maybe it's something that you haven't thought of for a long while. Go ahead, share with each other.

(Share)

I hope that you have all found out a little bit more about each other. Maybe we can encourage each other to share those gifts a little bit more. You see another important part of sharing gifts and talents is encouraging others to use their special skills. History books hold many stories of people whose talents could have been lost to the world. Einstein was four years old before he could speak and seven before he could read. A newspaper editor fired Walt Disney because he had no good ideas to offer. Annie Sullivan, who later became Helen Keller, was locked away in an insane asylum until someone gave her a chance to learn and develop. Someone saw the potential in these people and gave them an opportunity to develop their abilities and talents. Many others like them have enriched our world after someone gave them encouragement.

Today, we are saying goodbye to Gibson. I think that Gibson is not at all like the third servant. He is more like the first servant. He has spent his teenage years developing and sharing his skills in music – at school, at St Andrews in Stratford, and here with us at Knox. He has brought life and joy as he shares his talents – for those of you who heard the bagpipes at Easter Sunrise – you know he doesn't bury his talent! He has also given encouragement for others to use their talents too – through the wonderful Easter Cantata that the choir performed, the Jazz Vespers, and the Knox Café. Gibson, we are going to miss you very much! But, as you go onto Sackville to develop your musical talent, I know that you will be gift to many churches, and you will share your gift with joy to many people on your journey.

(Make presentation to Gibson)

Someone once said that:

“what we are given is God's gift to us; but what we can become is our gift to God!”

We can't become that gift if we bury our talents in the ground. And our gifts can only be made more beautiful through daily use and by offering them for God's service. May all of us leave here today, especially you Gibson, encouraged to continue to use our gifts for God. Amen.