

Ser20-44 Bring Many Gifts 11-15-20 24th Sunday After Pentecost

Judges 4:1-7; Ps. 123 or ps 90:1-12; **1 Thess. 5:1-11; Matt. 25:14-30**

“Real Life Relating – Spiritual Best Friends”

In our gospel text this morning, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven “is also like a spiritual guide or friend going off on an extended trip. The guide called three of her special friends together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five talents: faith, love, confidence, trust and generosity. To another two gifts: faith and love. And to a third one gift: faith. Then she left. Right off, the first spiritual friend went out and used his gifts of friendship to make five new friends to whom he was a spiritual guide and friend.

The second did the same – going out into the community and making two new friends. She shared her faith and her love in an abundant way. But, the one with the single gift of faith was afraid and stayed at home and isolated himself from getting connected with anyone new---hoping somehow to protect his one gift of faith. He didn’t want to loose it.

"After a long absence, the spiritual master of those three friends came back to see how things were going. The one given five spiritual gifts showed her how he had grown his gifts. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.

"The friend with the two gifts (faith and love) showed how she also had grown her master's investment. Her spiritual master commended her: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The one friend given the single gift of faith said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate self-centered ways, that you always desire the best in

relationships. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and kept my faith and life to myself. I didn't make any new friends.

"The spiritual guide was disappointed and sad. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's live cautiously like that! It's unfaithful to God's desire for relationship to live from such scarcity. "If you knew I was after the best for you, why did you do less than the least?" The least you could have done would have been to spend some time with folks at your church or a community—to at least let others know you a little. I pray you will let go of this "play-it-safe, "take-no-risks," approach to your relationships.

God calls us into a world of abundant relationships – in our families, where it all starts; in our school rooms, where we grow our first friendships; in our work, in our church, and in our community, where we grow in our relationships. The first two friends, in this rather loose re-telling of the Matthew's story of the ten talents, lived life by responding to God's gift of relationships by living out of abundance. The third one lived out of scarcity. To live out of abundance means we take risks and we are generous with our faith, love, trust and loyalty.

In my wedding ceremonies I almost always remind couples that "What marriage is about is about what life is about, about what relationships are about: growth, change, trust, truth, loyalty, honesty and openness of heart and most especially marriage is about living your live in faith and love day by day by day.

We all know people who are like the three friends in my earlier story. Some folks are just so outgoing and openly generous with their gifts and life--- they just invite others to be part of their life and faith. Some are not quite so extroverted but show an openness and energy that says, "be my friend. They may take a little longer to get to be your best friend but the opportunity is there.

And we know—in these days of Covid we are very, very cautious about meeting new people, even cautious as we ought to be in spending time with others in the precovid ways. And if you add fear of a loving relationship, fear of risking a broken heart to that mix, then you might do as the third friend did in my opening story.

Did you notice that in Matthew's gospel, the master punishes the one who buried his one talent. He is punished and turned away. That's a very unsettling part of Jesus' parable. In my take on this parable, even the one who is afraid to risk is still loved and God still desires a relationship with him. So, all are welcomed into the kingdom.

To support my version of this story, I look to Paul's writing in the epistle 1 Thes. 5:9-11 *God didn't set us up for an angry rejection but for salvation by our Master, Jesus Christ. [10] He died for us, a death that triggered life. Whether we're awake with the living or asleep with the dead, we're alive with him! [11] So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you'll*

all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you're already doing this; just keep on doing it.

I can't finish this without

St. Paul says it well: "Therefore, encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." May it be so in your lives and in mine. Amen.