

Sermon for November 16th, 2014

Twenty Third Sunday of Pentecost, Matthew 25:14-30

Blessings and peace to you from God the Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

This morning I am going to begin with a story about a girl who was born in **April 1866** in Massachusetts. She was the **oldest** child of an Irish immigrant family. When she was about **5 years** old she contracted trachoma, a **painful** eye disease caused by bacteria, which causes severe vision loss. When she was about 8 her mother died. She had a **bad disposition, a violent temper**, consequently she was **very difficult to handle**. Her father abandoned her; none of her family wanted her so she was sent to live in a **‘poor’ house** in Tewksbury, Mass. with more than **900** other men, women, and children. The conditions there were awful, the mortality rate was high, the place was underfunded and in major disrepair. During her time at the **Tewksbury Almshouse** she was so wild at times that she had to be **tied** down. There was a lady there, **Maggie**, who took this little girl under her wing, she talked to her, she cared for her, she fed her even though the little girl would **throw** her food on the floor. Eventually the girl began to respond. The girl found out about a school for the blind, she begged to go, and finally she was given consent to attend the **Perkins Institute** where her life was changed forever.

When the girl began the institute at the age of 14 she could **not** read **nor** could she write her name. She had **never** owned a nightgown or a hairbrush. She did not know how to do many of the things that a girl of her age would know. She was **ridiculed** because of her ignorance and rough manners. She felt **humiliated** about her own shortcomings; yet her anger and shame fueled a **determination** to excel in her studies and she soon caught up with the others. She had surgery on her eyes which improved her vision dramatically. In 1886 she graduated and gave the **Valedictorian Address**. Her joy of graduating was tempered by her fear of an **unclear future** and what life had in store for her.

In the summer of **1886** Captain Keller of Alabama wrote to the director of the Perkins School asking him to recommend a teacher for his young daughter, Helen. Helen was now **7 years old** and she had been deaf and blind since the age of **19 months**.

So the young woman, Annie Sullivan, who had been the **troubled little girl** in her earlier years now became the teacher. **Intimidated** by the challenge she knew this is just the opportunity and undertaking she needed. Much has been written about the day Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan first met and of how in 1887 the teacher went to Tuscumbia, Alabama to begin a **new** chapter in her life. As a result of this relationship between Helen and her teacher, Annie, there have

been no two other individuals who have had a greater influence on the education of children who are deaf and blind.

Perhaps after hearing this story you are wondering **what** this would have to do with our **gospel** text for this morning. I ask you this, what if Annie Sullivan would have **given into** her fears and **taken the easy road** and **not responded** to the call of being Helen's teacher? Graduating from such a prestigious school may have held many opportunities for her. What if Annie would have played it safe, stayed right where she was, and not invested her talent in this teaching opportunity? The course of history would have been forever altered. **Many** have been richly blessed because of the risk and creative teaching approach that Annie took. Because of her willingness to step out in faith and confidence to do what she felt **called to do** countless numbers of people over the years have been helped. The talents given to her by God were multiplied **many** times over.

Once again today in our reading from Matthew's gospel the parable that we heard is regarding the anticipation of Jesus' return and how the disciples/we disciples are to live in the meantime. In our lesson we heard the parable of **rich man** who went on a journey and **entrusted** his slaves with a **huge** amount of money. Talents in Jesus' time were not considered gifts or characteristics given from God like we think of today, but they were units of money. One talent would have been equal to roughly **20 year's wages**. So in doing the math, the 5 talents

which was the largest amount entrusted to any of the servants was comparable to **100 years** worth of wages. To be given this great amount would have brought with it a **huge responsibility**.

Like the 2 preceding parables the return of the master is certain; although, the **timing is unknown**. After a **long time** the master of the slaves returned to find that the slaves he gave the 5 talents to and 2 talents had **both** doubled their talents. They had put their time to good use, they had done **remarkably well** with what they had been given. They had been proactive, they **traded** and made received more talents for the master, they performed according to their **potential**, and they had been faithful to what the master had required of them. His response to **both** of the slaves was the same, *“Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”*

The third slave is another story as **he** is the one who stands **center** stage. True, he got only 1 talent—only 20 year’s wages—only. He admits that he was afraid to lose the master’s talent as he saw the master as someone who was **harsh**, someone that was other than the one the other two slaves saw, the one who this slave saw he was **afraid** of. *“I didn’t want to lose the talent you gave me—so I went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid your money. I didn’t want to take a chance with it. Here is the talent back that you gave me.”*

The master was **furious**. He had entrusted this slave with a portion of his property in order that the slave would **use** his abilities—abilities that had **helped** the master in the past. A posture of **fear** had set in—this slave was **too afraid** to take a risk. Too interested in securing his own wellbeing. In the end his **unfaithfulness** to carry on the master’s work cost him dearly, “*as for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Off to the pits of hell for him.*”

For us today, **what** does our faithfulness look like in our time of waiting? Are we using the talents, the fruits of the spirit, the monetary blessings that God has **entrusted us with** to the **fullest** extent? Are we going about the work of the kingdom and applying our God given abilities to their **greatest** degree? It does not matter who we are. We have a **benevolent, loving God** who has given us the skills, the knack, the know how to **advance** the kingdom. Some of you are good **cooks**, some of you are **handy** around the house, some of you are **outgoing and easy to talk to**, some of you are **good listeners**, some of you can **sing well**, some of you are **great teachers**, and I could go on and on. But if you **do not use** what God has given you—your talents—if you **hide them in fear** there is a **risk** that you are taking. What if Annie Sullivan would have not stepped out and taken the risk and the opportunity before her? Would the world **have ever known** about her or Helen Keller?

For us faithfulness is emulating the ministry of Jesus. It is **announcing** God's kingdom through using our gifts and talents for God's glory, **feeding** the hungry, **welcoming** the stranger, **clothing** the naked, **visiting** the sick, **helping** those in need. May God **ble**s**s you all** as you continue to use the talents God has given to you. So when **your time comes** you too will hear, "*Well done, good and trustworthy slave, enter into the joy of your master.*" **Amen**