

“Use It or Lose it!”

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Matthew 25:14-30*

I recently read a story about a man who died and when they were winding up his estate it was discovered that in his will he wanted his estate left to the devil! Since the estate involved a property the executors of the will were at a loss as to how they would leave real estate to the devil. After some discussion his lawyers decided that the best way to honor their client’s request would be to simply let the property lie idle and do nothing to it. They figured that with the passing of time it would simply run down and fall into a state of disrepair and ruin.

Simply let the property lie idle and do nothing...certainly there were resources to do otherwise, to develop that property, to make it beautiful and productive. But, re the devil’s way – the destructive way is to do nothing.

How about Proverbs 24:30-34 (NKJV)

I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface covered with nettles; its stonewall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.

This man had a vineyard. He had the wherewithal to be productive, and profitable – but he wasted his talents.

Use it or lose it! You’ve heard that phrase a thousand times. “Use it or lost it.”

Understood, is you have had a talent, some knowledge, an ability, and you through idleness, lack of continued pursuit – lose that talent.

“Use it or lose it.”

It’s true for me in certain areas. I used to play baseball, first base was my position. I got pretty good at catching the ball if it was anywhere near me, even if I had to jump. Well, my jumping days are over, and playing first base is not in the cards. I haven’t practiced for years – I’ve lost it.

I’ve had two years of ancient Greek, and one year of ancient Hebrew. Today, I’m not as proficient as I once was. Seldom do I dazzle you with a Hebrew or Greek word and its etymology. I know you miss that. But, actually after my first few years out of Seminary, and pontificating to the congregation all my knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, I realized “oops, perhaps plain English will do.” I still know the basics, especially the Greek, but not as much as 25 yrs ago.

“Use it or lose it”

Oh, I used to know how to wash dishes, sweep, and do the laundry – I have tried to get Shawn to understand I’ve lost those talents – but surprisingly she can’t quite fathom my loss of these talents – and continuously encourages me to use my talents again...and again and again.

“Use it or lose it” – you know!

But, seriously there are some aspects, talents in our lives that need to be consistently honed and kept up, not neglected, not ignored, not buried!

Using our talents is a necessity for our lives – for thriving, for finding fulfillment and happiness. Granted we each have particular talents, some with more, others with less. But, we all have talents and they are to be used!

Now, let’s get personal! What about you? I’m sure many of you have defined your talents, what you are good at; abilities that come easy to you. But, what have you done with them? How seriously have you taken them? Now, don’t go saying, “I don’t have any talents, any abilities! Or at least any worth while.” Yes you do! God has given you talent/talents, get busy and use them!

Have you ever thought or said, “Better to not risk, better to not fail, better to just keep things the way they are, it’s safer that way?” Have you ever felt that way?

However you define “talent”, have you ever felt that it’s just easier to leave well enough alone, and not risk rocking the boat. So what if I feel I could do such and such, what if I don’t make it, or if I fail? I better not.”

This brings us to this morning’s gospel text. Jesus is in his teaching mode. This is one of three parables given one after the other. Keep in mind parables are stories with a twist. Parables are stories that put you on shaky ground. Just when you think you’re following the plot, surprise, the rug is pulled out from under you. And this parable is no exception.

Jesus shares his thinking of what God’s reign is like. What God expects of us. Apparently it’s serious business! There is also the issue of judgment in these parables. There is a sense of emergency in all of this. Jesus explains that the reign of God, the purpose of God, is like a traveling property owner, who entrusts his property to his servants. To the one servant he gives 5 talents. (Notice, originally a talent was a measure of weight, and developed into a monetary unit of the highest denomination. A talent was equal to the total wages of a person who labored from 15 to 38 years. A talent was a large sum of money. Also, as the word traveled through the centuries, it became synonymous for a person’s abilities, gifts. Hence, talents today. Etymologically it began with the sense of great value. The Greek word for this is...just kidding.)

The second servant was given two talents.

The third servant was given one talent.

Servants one and two doubled their talents, while servant three dug a hole and buried his talent.

Sometime later the owner came back. Instead of five talents, 10 are returned. Instead of two talents, four are returned. The owner of course is quite pleased. In fact, he is overjoyed. And now the third servant. What about him? “Well, sir, your reputation had preceded you, and so out of fear I buried your talent so as not to lose it. Here you go, it’s all yours! Here’s you one talent! The owner replies, “Sure. Thanks for protecting my talent. You didn’t have much to begin with, so my lad, thanks for taking care of it.” Not quite. Here’s the twist. The owner is incensed! “You wicked and slothful servant! How could you? Give me that talent! Here you with 10,

have another! Get rid of this guy!” Whoa! Where did that come from? The servant was just trying to keep the owner’s money safe!

But being safe is not the answer to God’s reign, God’s ways! Out of fear the third servant buried his talent. He remained idle. He wasted what had been given to him! He willfully chose not to use his talent!

Fear often causes paralysis. It keeps us from risking from taking chances to be creative and helpful. In terms of living in fear, Jesus is describing that we do so at a great cost. Does that relate? Does that hit home? “Well, I would like to try...but no I better not. What if I fail?” Fear keeps us from acting on our potential. And this parable exposes fear as destructive to our lives. Actually, we should fear the cost of not using our talents – of forever being unfulfilled.

Whatever talents you have been blessed with, do not waste them, do not neglect them. They are God-given! Be responsible! Use your talents. Increase their effects. Do not be fearful. Do not be afraid to risk using your abilities!

It’s up to you! Only you can make the decision to use your talents! Others will be there to help, to guide, but you must use your talents!

The Gospel proclaims “Use it or lose it!”

Apparently God does expect you to be responsible to yourself. What you have been given you need to cultivate and use. In fact, (and this rings true on a multiple of levels) if you have been extremely blessed with talents, more is expected of you!

Greater talents – greater responsibility!

To diminish your talents is harmful to all. Wherever you fit – 5, 2, 1 talents – get busy! If you are not sure, “inflate” and go from there! Do not underestimate yourself! God won’t.

My friends hear the Good News of the Gospel – Use it or lose it!

Amen.