

2020 11 15 – Dance Like Nobody’s Watching

Matthew 25:14-30

The third worker said to the landowner, “Knowing your ruthlessness—you who reap where you did not sow and gather where you did not scatter— and fearing your wrath, I went off and buried your thousand dollars in the ground. Here is your money back.”

I have to admit, I understand his choice to bury the money. My financial advisor would tell you that I prefer investments that are low to moderate risk. She knows that I have no interest in playing the stock market and taking a chance that I might lose my hard earned money. So I understand the third worker’s reluctance to invest, and possibly lose, the landowner’s money. I understand the fear of failure, of losing face, of being punished for screwing up. I live with fear every day.

We all live with fear, the fear that comes when facing something new, something different, something beyond our current expertise or knowledge. We all tremble at the thought of starting a new job, moving to a new place, or even entertaining a new friend. We worry about failing a test, stumbling during a speech, stitching a wrong seam or cutting a board too long or too short. We are afraid of stretching our wings, of using the gifts that God has given us. We are afraid of trying and failing.

Today's parable is a story about money and how it is possible to grow our wealth if we are willing to take the risk and invest what we have given. But like all of Jesus' parables, it also about much more. Jesus is telling us that God has given each one of us an abundance of gifts and talents. Maybe some have been given more than others but we all have enough to make a difference. The only question is whether we have the courage to step out of our comfort zone and live—as we sang earlier this morning—“so God can use [us].” *Voices United #575*

This week I found a story on the Internet that illustrates this kind of courage. I believe it came from one of the *Chicken Soup for Soul* books. It begins:

Two seeds lay side by side in the fertile spring soil.

The first seed said, "I want to grow! I want to send my roots deep into the soil beneath me, and thrust my sprouts through the earth's crust above me.... I want to unfurl my tender buds like banners to announce the arrival of spring. ... I want to feel the warmth of the sun on my face and the blessing of the morning dew on my petals!"

And so she grew.

The second seed said, "I am afraid. If I send my roots into the ground below, I don't know what I will encounter in the dark. If I push my way through the hard soil above me I may damage my delicate sprouts ... what if I let my buds open and a snail tries to eat them? And if I were to

open my blossoms, a small child may pull me from the ground. No, it is much better for me to wait until it is safe."

And so she waited.

A yard hen, scratching around in the early spring ground for food, found the waiting seed and promptly ate it.

<https://thelivingleader.com/risking/>

Patti Hansen, one of the author's of the *Soup for the Soul* books, tells us the moral of the story is, "Those of us who refuse to risk and grow get swallowed up by life." One of our Canadian heroes, Wayne Gretzky put it this way, "You'll always miss 100% of the shots you don't take." And, turning this idea around, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote, "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face."

Some risks can be life-changing. For instance, when I followed my call to ministry, it meant leaving everyone and everything I knew behind to come to a new vocation, a new province, a new culture, a new life. But opportunities to grow and to use the gifts God has given us do not always require us to leave everything behind. Sometimes it can be just as scary, and just as important to risk right where we are. Think of something that scares you, something that you've been thinking about doing. It could be a new hobby, a new volunteer position, a room that needs decorating, a phone call that you've been putting off.

God has given you not only the ability to do what needs to be done, but also the courage to make it happen.

Today's scripture passage began with the words "Again [the reign of God, the kingdom of heaven] is like a wealthy landowner who was going on a journey and called in three of his workers." In this parable Jesus is describing heaven on earth. He is describing a time when we will all have the courage to live "so God can use [us]"

I'm not suggesting that we take risks just for the thrill. I'm not suggesting that we be reckless with our lives and the lives of others. Risks should be about helping, not harming. The risks that we take in our lives need to be ones that will bring us closer to our true selves, closer to the people that we are meant to be, closer to the Ground of our Being, the God of Love.

I'm also not suggesting that we will be punished by God if we are unable to let go of our fear. Today's parable ends with the words, "Throw this worthless one outside into the darkness, where there is wailing and grinding of teeth." I don't believe in a God of punishment. But I do believe that when we allow fear to run our lives then we "get swallowed up by life," we create our own hell on earth, we live in our own self-created darkness.

A previous minister of mine ended all of her emails with the following quote from Mark Twain (you'll find it in today's bulletin):

"Dance like nobody's watching;
love like you've never been hurt.

Sing like nobody's listening;
live like it's heaven on earth."

Every time we listen to that sacred voice within each one of us and follow despite our fears, every time we dance, sing, or love without worrying what others will think, every time we find the courage to use our talents and to grow then we are building God's heaven on earth, God's reign of peace and justice. So I invite us all to take the risk and to "dance like nobody's watching."