

You! Faithful Servants

As you know, almost every Sunday I talk about treasures with our children. I know that the children in our congregation are not the only ones who enjoy our children's time; you are also anxiously waiting for today's treasure. You may not remember any of my sermons, but I think you might remember some of the treasures that we have celebrated together. It's fun to think about what our treasures might be, though sometimes new ideas don't come to mind easily. All I have to do is see and listen with an open heart and open mind, because there is treasure everywhere. For me, the greatest joy of celebrating a treasure is to watch our children; they are eager to guess with curiosity and wonder, and sometimes with confusion, and they're pretty good at making accurate guesses. I like how adults and children alike find joy in exploring the hidden treasures that we have been given from God, and finding new things to celebrate each week. I wonder if our children realize that they are the greatest treasure of all. I wonder if you know that you are also the greatest treasure of all. I am here today to congratulate you because you are God's special treasure.

Over the last week, I've been thinking and reflecting on today's Gospel reading, the parable of the Talents. I think it's usual to preach a sermon warning about the perils of being like the third servant, and to encourage the congregation to try and be like the first two servants, but I am convinced that you are already like the first and the second servant who are faithful to their master. No matter how hard I try to find parallels, you are far from the third servant who hid the talent in the ground. Moreover, unlike the parable where there doesn't seem to be any communication or relationship between the servants, you keep encouraging one another not to hide your talents, but to use them all. I am sure that the master is even more pleased with you than with the two servants in the parable, who did not take care of or encourage the one frightened servant, who was so afraid of

risk. So this is indeed God's message to you; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, which is also from today's lectionary reading, "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing."

I was in a conversation with a colleague about the refugee project. She said that the outreach committee in her church was going to talk about how to be involved with the project. I said, "Oh it's good for your church to have such a committee. We don't have one." And she said, "No, you don't need it, because the whole congregation of your church is doing outreach." She was right. Yes, that's what I see. Every single one of you gets involved with such a great heart. Your concern and vision go beyond our town and our country. You are engaging the world, praying and working for peace and justice. You don't play it safe, living cautiously and prudently. You give your heart away, and are not afraid to take risks, because you know that there is a life in giving and sharing and not in keeping everything for yourself; it's following Christ that you are concerned about most. I remember when we had our congregational meeting almost two months ago to decide whether to sponsor a refugee family, and one of you reminded us of who we are by saying, "Let's follow Christ". For me, the greatest joy of our refugee project is seeing everyone working together for the same purpose: bringing the family home and following Christ in the world. The talent, passion and dreams you are given from God are doubling, bringing more people to the same mission, as we have seen with our own eyes at the refugee benefit concert last Sunday.

So this is indeed God's message to you. "Well done, good and trustworthy servants; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Notice the last words, "enter into the joy of your master." That is the greatest gift God gives you, faithful servants. That is the promise Jesus made to you, faithful servants, as a heavenly reward that we can experience even now, as we worship God today.

In the parable, the talents that the master gives his servants are, I think, a sign of his presence, will and trust in his servants during his absence. The master does not give any direction or condition regarding the use of the talents. The servants have freedom just like the master has, at least before his return. The first and the second servant seem to enjoy using their resources just like the master does. I think they are the ones who keep doing what their master has been doing. The master rewards them with the promise of fellowship with himself. It becomes apparent that this master actually needs friends, and wants his servants to be his friends. It was such fellowship that the master was wishing for. Regrettably, the third one's fear both prevents him from acting and alienates him from his master.

For me, this story is not about who is like the first or second servant and who is like the third servant. Instead, it is about our life experience, since we all have experienced both sides of the story. At some points in our life, we have all been like the third servant, concealing our talent deep in our hearts, so well-hidden only we and God knew the location. Maybe we did not even know that we had such a gift, or believe we would ever get a chance to use it. But - at some point in our lives, we realized that there was nothing to fear, nothing to worry about in the following of our master, Jesus, whose life was always high risk, and always full of joy, love and life. Our Christ is on the way to congratulate you on your faithfulness. His joy will be yours forever.