

# “INVEST”

Matthew 25:14-30

Sermon notes from the pulpit of  
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois  
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Matt Matthews

Let's begin with the gnashing of teeth.

This parable plainly says, if we are faithful, if we 'invest' in living the faith, we will be rewarded. If we are not faithful, we will be thrown into, quote: "the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This text is what we might call a text of terror.

I want to tell you, with gladness, that sometimes I am a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, even if I don't get it right, I'm trying to get it right. Certainly, God will give me an A for effort.

But sometimes... Sometimes I am not a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. I'm not succeeding at being faithful, and not only am I not succeeding at being faithful, I'm not even trying to be faithful.

This text serves as the sternest of warnings in the whole New Testament: If you are afraid of a one-way-ticket to the land of outer darkness, then be faithful. Live the faith. Invest your talents for the good of the community.

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I'd like to suggest this is not a text about fear.

When we read the gospel, we notice that Jesus's ministry was not governed by fear. Jesus' ministry was motivated by urgency, yes, but *not* fear. Jesus' ministry is marked by joy and love (and by the other fruits of the spirit Paul describes in Galatians 5: peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.) Jesus embodies these gifts. Jesus embodies humility and courage, yes. But fear? No.

I think it is fair to say that when faithfulness is motivated by fear, it is devoid of Joy. Faithfulness motivated by fear is devoid of Love; and faithfulness without of love isn't faithfulness at all. Fear brings sickness and dis-ease, enmity and strife. Fear builds walls. Fear stirs suspicion. Fear tears at the community. We have enough fear in this world.

No, Jesus is not trying to scare us into faith. Fear is not his point. His point is to invite us all to live the gospel fully, hopefully, faithfully, spending our whole selves in God's service.

Jesus is begging his disciples to invest in life.

Jesus is using a banking metaphor. Three servants are given talents to invest. (A “talent” is a large sum of money.<sup>[1]</sup>) Two servants invest. One servant, because he is paralyzed by fear, does not invest his talent. He buries it. When the master returns, each of the servants returns the initial money and also returns the money they made from investing it. The first two are rewarded because they invested the money. The third person is not rewarded because he did not invest his money.

This story is about investing what has been entrusted to our care. In other words, God has given us gifts to share. We are called to share these gifts. We aren’t called to hoard them. God does not want us to bury our gifts in the ground.

We are called to live life generously.

We are called to live life fully.

If we let it, fear will paralyze us. Jesus is saying, loudly and clearly, don’t let that happen. Do not be afraid. Be brave. Step into your calling. Use what you’ve been given for the good of others. Invest in life. Invest in building a community of hospitality and welcome. Take risks to do good.

*Invest in me.*

I don’t think the master in this parable (and this mean-spirited master is NOT meant to be God) would be mad if one of these servants lost his money, IF that servant had invested his money as wisely as he knew how. The master wanted the servant to invest, and that was the bar of success. “You invested my money with an eye on making a profit, which is the whole point of investing. Your investment didn’t pan out. Sometimes they don’t. But you were faithful. And that was what I asked you to be.”

Jesus is urging his listeners, likewise, to invest. Don’t be afraid. Be faithful to God by the giving of yourself. Share what God has given you. Be the blessing you were created to be.

If we use our gifts only for ourselves, our family, our circle, our church, our small world—shame on us.

When we risk nothing in life, we’re already living in the farthest land of outer darkness. Our selfishness and laziness have cut us off from our neighbors in the world that God calls us to embrace. By burying our talents in the ground, by not caring, by not loving passionately, by not investing ourselves, by not risking anything—is something akin to death (Buchanan, p. 312, *Feasting on the Word, Yr A, Vol 4*).

If we don’t invest in life, we already know what the land of outer darkness looks like.

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The Reverend Deborah Owen, pastor at St. Peters UCC, died this week after a long illness. Deborah was a thoughtful theologian, great pastor, and justice-minded neighbor who attempted to bring healing to the world. When I interviewed here, she was one of your references. She’s served several churches here in Champaign-Urbana. She is wise, widely known, wildly respected and deeply loved. She will be missed.

She is the one who introduced me to this saying: Church people and God people are not the same thing. Church people go to church God people are the church.

In our text today that ends with the gnashing of teeth, Jesus is kick-starting us out of lethargy. Jesus is waking us up. Jesus is begging us to be the church in the world. Jesus is saying:

Invest in life.

Invest in your neighbor.

Invest in me.

Risk your heart by giving it away.

In the name of God the Great Creator, the Sweet Redeemer, and Holy Sustainer. AMEN.

Scripture Matthew 25:14-30

14“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

16The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents.

17In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.

18But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

19After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them.

20Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made

five more talents.’ 21His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

22And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ 23His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’

24Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

26But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest.

28So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

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<sup>[1]</sup> The word “talent” in this text has to do with a weight of precious metal, usually gold. A talent in New Testament times weighed about 57 pounds; it was the size of about one cubic foot, or, in liquid mass, 26 liters. An Attic Talent equaled about 6,000 drachmaes. Greek soldiers were paid one drachmae per day. So, Jesus is not talking about a few loose coins. To be the keeper of five Talents—even one Talent—was a sizeable and valuable investment.