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Matthew 25:14-30  
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## **Risky Business**

Are you a risk taker? Do you know someone who is?

A young man enlisted in the 82nd Airborne Division. He was assigned to their jump school. He eagerly asked his recruiter what he could expect at jump school.

"Well," the recruiter said, "it's three weeks long."

"What else?" asked the young soldier.

"The first week they separate the men from the boys," the recruiter said. "The second week, they separate the men from the fools."

"And the third week?" the soldier asked.

"The third week," the recruiter said with a grin, "the fools jump."

Does jumping from an airplane appeal to you? Are you one of the fools?

No? Me, neither!

Then how about jumping over a wall instead?

I saw a video of a skateboarder who jumped over the Great Wall of China in 2009. He became the first person in history to clear the wall without motorized aid.

Danny Way, then 30 years old, completed the jump across the 61-foot gap four times. On his last three attempts, he added 360-degree spins.

"I was aware of the dangers," Way said, "and my heart was pumping in my chest the whole time."

Or how about Philippe Petit who in 1974 made an unauthorized tightrope walk between the Twin Towers.

Or 63-year-old Annie Edson Taylor who in 1901 was the first man or woman to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel and survive!

That's amazing to me . . . first of all, that they were successful . . .and secondly, that they would take such a risk in the first place.

How about you? How big of a risk are you willing to take?

Our text this morning is about two risk takers and one . . . well, not so much.

You just heard the story. Wealthy guy goes on a trip and leaves each of his three servants with a boatload of money to take care of while he is gone.

To one he gives 5 talents, to one he gives 2 talents, and to the 3<sup>rd</sup> he gives one talent.

A talent, by the way, was worth about 15 years wages. In other words, even for the one-talent guy, it was A LOT of money. Probably about \$750,000 in today's dollars!

Both the first two, double the master's money by the time he returns.

For both of these servants, it was a leap of faith to risk perhaps losing the money.

But they did it, and as a result of their efforts, they were able to give a really great report to the master when he returned.

He praises both of them profusely.

The third, buries the money. Now, he doesn't lose any, but he doesn't risk anything either, and returns the full amount to his master.

The Master blows a gasket and really reads the guy the riot act. End of story.

Okay, let me make a couple of observations. First, the story is clear that talents are not distributed in equal amounts.

We Americans like to say, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

That may be true in the next life, but it certainly isn't true in this one. Equality is elusive and even equality of opportunity is more rhetoric than reality.

The reality is that you and I have all been given different kinds of talents, abilities, and resources.

But none of them are handed out equally. There is always someone smarter, more athletic, better looking, more gifted. And someone less.

However, if you notice – all three were entrusted with some amount of talent. Everybody in this life has some talent. Nobody goes without.

But even though all got something – the master's reaction to what they did with those talents when he returned was not close to the same.

We understand his being proud of the first two, but why so angry with the third? The guy didn't lose any of his money, right?

The problem was that the third servant—the one-talent servant— did not even try.

He dug a hole in the ground and buried the money—and then he just sat back to wait for his master to return.

You need to understand, though, that back in Jesus' day, burying a treasure wasn't considered to be such a bad thing. For most poor people, that's what they did with their savings.

AND according to their laws, if this one-talent man buried the master's money and someone found it and stole it, the one-talent man could not be held liable.

In other words, this one-talent man took the safest, easiest way out. He didn't make much of an effort and he didn't take much of a chance. He was afraid.

And he says exactly that to his master.

I also think that Jesus is trying to get across to us the point that God doesn't look just at your "talent" or how many talents you have.

He looks at what you DO with that talent.

Some people say: "I can't teach. I can't sing. I can't play an instrument. I can't work on computers. I don't have a lot of money to give to the church."

I can't do this, or I can't do that. And the list goes on and on and on. Maybe, they think they don't have much to offer God because they CAN'T DO the BIG talent things. They don't have showy or impressive gifts.

But this parable is saying: God doesn't care about what you CAN'T DO.

He just cares about what you CAN.

This parable is essentially telling us: Don't just sit there... do something!!! Find something!!! Create something!!! Do ANYTHING!!! But don't just sit there and do NOTHING!

And that usually involves some measure of risk.

Risk isn't a bad thing. Truth be told, there is no way in this world to avoid risk.

When you love someone, that is a risk. When you have a child, that is a risk. When you decide on an occupation, that is a risk.

You can't hide from risk without stunting your life.

Author Denis Waitley once paraphrased a well-known poem by an unknown author to read like this:

*There was a very cautious man ... Who never laughed or played  
He never risked, he never tried ... He never sang or prayed  
And when he one day passed away ... His insurance was denied  
For since he never really lived ... They claimed he never died.*

We often think of ministry as being a solo venture. You hire a preacher and it's his or her job to minister to the congregation. But we often forget that ministry is to be done with others.

For example, we forget that Moses was given a community of elders to help lead the people of Israel.

Countless times in the Old Testament book of Exodus, Moses summons the Israelite elders to help him minister to the people.

We forget that Jesus began his ministry by gathering Andrew and Simon Peter, and later the rest of the disciples.

Now just how more ordinary can you get?

Here're two guys minding their own business, in a boat, fishing, and at that very moment, they are selected by the Son of God to help spread the gospel message.

You just never know when opportunity will come knocking!

Unfortunately, the most pervasive tendency of Christians today is to be reluctant servants.

It is the belief that if God wants something done, hopefully, God will call on someone else, more able than me to do it.

I'm sure many of us have heard people excuse themselves from supporting the church by their prayers, their time, their talents and their treasure by appealing to what they do not have:

“I’m too old.” “I’m too young.” “I’m not educated.” “I’m too busy.”  
“I’m not good enough.” “I could never do that.”

When God asked Moses to tell Pharaoh to “let my people go,” Moses also used a number of phrases to complain about what he did not have:

“Who am I that I should go?” “Suppose they do not believe me.”  
“I have never been eloquent.”

After listening to Moses’ complaints, God said to him: “What is that in your hand?” (A staff)

In essence, God was saying: “Moses, I am not interested in what you don’t have; I am only interested in what you do have. Reach out your hand ... and certainly I will be with you.”

And that is what this year’s stewardship campaign is all about.  
“Looking back with Gratitude, Moving Forward in Faith.”

You all are going to need to step up in the coming months. You are going to have to risk.

I am convinced that the kind of God people believe in determines how willing they are to risk great things for God.

If you are here this morning out of fear, you probably don’t enjoy worship very much. You’re here because you’re afraid that God will punish you if you stay home.

Still, God expects us to use what we have, great or small, to honor him—to help in the building in the kingdom of God. To risk stepping out in faith.

The question I have for you today, both as individuals and as a church, is how do you perceive our “heavenly” master?

The Master wouldn’t have been upset with the “one talent servant” if he’d even just gone out and put it in the bank so it would earn interest.

He didn’t have to try very hard. He just had to TRY! If he’d have at least tried, the master would have been satisfied.

However, you say, “but Tom, the third servant had a right to be afraid, he DID get punished, the master DID turn out to be harsh. He ended up getting thrown in the street with all that gnashing of teeth stuff!”

And I would say to you that it was his own *interpretation*, his own *perception* of who God is that put him there, because that’s the only place that is open to you if your view of God is of a wrathful angry God.

You put yourself in a place of torment.

The first two servants, though, held a very different understanding of who the master was, and therefore, knew that when it came right down to it, there was really no risk at all.

They understood that they (we) serve a wealthy beyond measure, benevolent, generous God, who had given them (us) more than they could ever think or see or imagine.



We serve a God who has blessed us with numerous gifts and that the only risk involved is in not *using* them.

There is no *fear* of messing up, because when you've experienced God's love, you realize that *that* love is *perfect*, and perfect love casts out all fear.

I have always heard that within the church 20% of the people do 80% of the work. And I think it is mostly true.

It is a noble thing that some people are willing to invest so much time into the Lord's service, but the truth is, the Lord has given each of us talents to use in the service of his Kingdom.

Do you ever wonder what the church would be like if every one of us used our talents to serve the Lord?

You can start small, if you want. What small things can you do?

Help pass the offering plates. Be a part of the Prayer chain. Teach Sunday School. Work in the Nursery. Clean the sink in the bathroom, so the next person doesn't see it a mess.

The challenge for us is this: How can we use our resources of time and talent and treasure for God?

At the very least we must keep our promise to God when we joined his church, to be loyal to it, and uphold it by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service!

But we can go even further than this!

What is the special thing you can do that nobody else in the world can do in quite the same way?

Is it a laugh? A smile? Is it an ability to encourage? Is it an ability to earnestly pray? Is it a loving tone people hear in your voice?

Is it a skill in music or art or teaching or managing or, or ... the possibilities are almost limitless!

As the Prophet Jeremiah wrote, "For God knows the plans God has for you ... to prosper and not harm."

To give you hope and a future. And you know what? You can't mess up God's plan.

When it comes right down to it, there's no risk at all. Just take the step.

You are called to be vigilant. You are called to step up to the plate and do your part and probably more.

But, be not afraid. Yes, it is risky business, but God has trusted you, and God will empower you.

So, do not fear – but risk boldly. You may be pleasantly surprised!

*Amen.*