

**The Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost...Series A**  
*Saint Peter's Episcopal Church (November 17th, 2002)*

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Title: **Good and FAITH-FILLED Servant...**

In the interests of transparency, I need to acknowledge that the main theme and the central focus for my homily on this 24<sup>th</sup> (and "next-to-the-last) Sunday after the great Feast of Pentecost is not original...I didn't come up with it all by myself. ! I am indebted to my friend and esteemed colleague, Fr. Rick Morley (Rector for many years at St. Mark's EC in Basking Ridge and the author of a weekly blog, entitled *A Garden Path*, which contains reflections on the Gospel for the up-coming Sunday; a blog I often referred to in my own sermon preparation. In a blog post (dated November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011) Fr. Rick makes the point that the NRSV translation of the Greek noun PISTOS (which is found 4 times in verses 21 and 22 of today's Gospel) is TRUSTWORTHY, and, Fr. Rick points out that, although TRUSTWORTHY is a perfectly acceptable English translation of the Greek noun PISTOS, it is not the BEST or the most common translation. And, Fr. Rick is certainly correct about that. In fact, most English translations of the New Testament (including the KJV; the RSV; the NIV; The Modern English Translation and the Message) translate the Greek noun PISTOS not as Trustworthy but as **FAITHFUL**. Fr. Rick thinks this is significant and so do !!! So, the Master in the parable congratulates Servant # 1 and Servant #2: with these words: **"WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT...you have been faithful in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Now enter into the joy of your Master"...**

So, here is the point: Servant #1 (the 5 Talent servant) and Servant #2 (the 2 Talent servant) were **FAITHFUL**...their stewardship of their Master's resources was **"FILLED WITH FAITH"**; Servant #1 and Servant #2 took a risk; they wisely and prudently invested their master's resources; the resources the master had entrusted to their STEWARDSHIP. Servant # 3 (the 1 Talent servant), on the other hand was a "FAITHLESS Servant" his stewardship of his master's resources was not FAITH-FILLED...rather, it was **FEARFUL**...Servant #3 was afraid of his Master; he was afraid of failure; he was "risk-averse" ; so he did what he regarded as the safe thing...he dug a hole and hid his Master's money, and when the Master returned, Servant #3 (the One Talent Servant) was seriously and severely reprimanded for his FEAR-FILLED and FAITHLESS stewardship!

Friends, I am convinced that the Parable of the Talents is a Stewardship parable which confronts us with a serious question...a personal; profound and a penetrating question; a question which insists on being asked and answered on this 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend of our annual Fall Stewardship campaign as we prepare to make our commitments of Time/Talent and Treasure for 2021. My friends, the soul-searching question at the heart of the Parable of the Talents is this: **"what are you doing; how are you using/investing/managing the abundant resources that God has so graciously entrusted to you in this life...."**

Servant # 1 and Servant #2 were congratulated for their **FAITH-FILLED** Stewardship...Servant #3 was reprimanded for his **FEAR-FILLED** Stewardship. And the Parable of the Talents calls those of us who are listening this evening/morning to a serious

reflection of our own STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE...is our stewardship **FAITH-FILLED** or is it **FEAR-FILLED**?

The impulse to hoard what we have (to dig a hole and bury our treasure) is a response to fear. The one talent servant was afraid of his master...the five and two talent servants trusted in the goodness and mercy and the steadfast love of their master. And that made all the difference...all the difference in the world! And these are really the two options open to us as well...Fear of the Master or Faith in the Master!

So, here is the truth as I have come to understand it...The opposite of FAITH is not doubt (doubt is an element of Faith). Doubt is not the opposite of FAITH...FEAR is the opposite/the antithesis of FAITH. FEAR is a powerful human emotion which can (and often does) paralyze and immobilize our stewardship of life. Fear causes us to "play it safe"; to be anxious and preoccupied with ourselves and our own wants and needs rather than the wants and needs of our neighbors. FAITH energizes us to risk investing what God has given us to advance the Kingdom of justice/peace and love and to build a better world for all of us. ! FEAR leads, inevitably to tepid and anemic generosity. FAITH sets us free to Give...generously/joyfully even recklessly! Faith leads to Faith-Filled Generosity...and FAITH-FILLED GENEROSITY is what this annual Stewardship campaign is all about!!

Let me close my homily this morning by suggesting a slight modification in the ending to Jesus' parable of the Talents:

When the One Talent servant was asked to give an account of his stewardship, he said, *"Master, I knew you to be a harsh man; an uncompromising and astute businessman, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, so I invested your money in an exciting and promising business opportunity. Now, before I invested, I checked it out with my financial advisor, and he assured me that this was one of those rare "once-in-a-life-time; absolutely "can't miss" opportunities. If it had worked out, I would have tripled (maybe quadrupled) the Talent you had given me. But, Master, something went terribly wrong...the company went bankrupt and we (I guess I should say YOU) lost everything; every penny I invested on your behalf....(there was a long and uncomfortable silence) Then the Master smiled and he said, "well done my good and faithful servant...even though this investment opportunity didn't work out, at least you tried...you gave it your best shot. I hope that, through this experience you have learned something important about your Master...I hope you learned that I don't expect you to always be successful (let's face it-failure is a part of life in the real world and we probably learn more from our failures than we do from our successes)...Most of all, I hope you have learned that all I expect of you (and of all of my servants) is to be faithful in your stewardship of all that I have entrusted to you.....So...well done; **WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITH-FILLED SERVANT...now come in, and share in the joy of your Master's happiness!"***

**Amen...**