

### ***Spreading It Around***

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Sunshine Cathedral, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
Psalm 90.1-2, 16-17; Matthew 25.14-28

I hate to be indelicate. But it's just us, so I don't mind sharing with you something that, well, was always a great embarrassment to my family. You see, there was a brief period of time when my great-aunt Gladys lived her life as a naturist; in vulgar parlance, a nudist.

I know, I know, I'm mortified to share this information; but I feel as if I can trust you with this. It only lasted a couple of years, but for those two years, anytime we'd go visit Aunt Gladys, there she'd be...in the all-together. I spent so much time looking up I got permanent whip lash.

Aunt Gladys just thought it was natural, wholesome to live as she entered the world, and she wanted to share that wholesomeness with everyone. I respected her view, but it did make gift giving occasions difficult. I mean [Here I sing, "What can you give a nudist for her birthday..."]

Well, Aunt Gladys shared her authentic self, even when others didn't understand or appreciate her gift.

It reminds me of that fabulous musical, *Gypsy*. There is that wonderful 11 o'clock number when Mama Rose sings, "Some people got it and make it pay; some people can't even give it away. This people's got it and this people's spreading it around..."

That's an important lesson. If you've got it, spread it around. Strangely enough, that is exactly the point of this morning's gospel lesson.

Now, the parable of the talents needs a little explanation. We usually think of talent as a skill. Dancing, playing an instrument, painting, gardening, cooking...use your talents because the more you use them the more they bless others and the more the talents will seem to multiply. It's a good lesson, but it isn't exactly what this passage is talking about.

A talent was in fact a unit of currency. A talent was worth about six thousand denari, which was about 6000 times more than a laborer's daily wage. The sum of money Matthew is tossing around is obscenely extravagant, and clearly meant to be symbolic.

Matthew certainly didn't know anyone who had or who had ever seen six thousand denari.

Now, the talent is money, but the money in this story is symbolic, which is why it is so extravagant. Matthew's point is that in the world of business, money wisely invested often yields an abundant return. You can bury your money in a mattress, or you can do something with it that will earn interest. In the world of commerce, earning interest is obviously better than doing nothing.

So, Matthew is using the business metaphor to describe the power of the Spirit. The spirit, or life of God within us, is meant to be shared. The more we spread it around, the more we share the light, the more good is accomplished. We can say that all that celebration and joy and outreach is too extravagant, too glamorous, too opulent, too ostentatious, but isn't that exactly what grace is?

Grace is wasteful, extravagant, abundant, unmerited, and unending! Do we use the spirit within us to bring hope and joy to others and to attract more people to the party, or do we bury it, stifle it, try to keep it from flowering and flourishing? Nature is glorious, and the spirit within us is the very power of Nature. It deserves to be expressed in glorious ways; it intends to be expressed in glorious ways.

I once worshiped at a church that cost, in those days, \$3 million dollars to build. It was a lot of money to be sure. And some people complained that all that money could have fed or housed or educated people. What they failed to realize is that 3 million dollar building did educate about 2,000 people every week. That 3 million dollar building offered professional counseling to people day and night throughout the week. That 3 million dollar building provided a spiritual home for a congregation that donated clothes every year to children in a nearby school. And most amazingly, that 3 million dollar building got so much publicity that it was able to raise \$10 million for AIDS.

Yes, 3 million dollars could have fed a few people for a short time. But, instead, it was used to build a congregation and a worship space that gave many times that amount to many more people and causes. People were fed, educated, counseled, visited, encouraged, befriended, and empowered because of how that 3 million dollars was spent. It was spread around to do the most good for the most people for the longest period of time. That building wasn't a waste, it was an investment in the lives of human-beings for generations to come.

Some people said that the orchestra, organ, choir, vested clergy, stained glass windows, marble altar...it was just too much. It was all a big show. And it was...it

was a show of how grateful and how joyous people were to find community and to find a home that reminded them of their sacred value. The joy they experienced had to be expressed in a big way, a way big enough to attract more people so that others could enjoy what they had found. The joy had to be spread around.

When I think and talk about some of the great churches of our time...the Crystal Cathedral-Garden Grove, Marble Collegiate-New York, St. Bartholomew's-New York, All Saints-Pasadena, Riverside-New York, All Souls-New York...I do so with admiration. Do you know why? Because those churches decided to spread hope and goodwill and encouragement and celebration around. Whether we are talking about the neo-gothic architecture of Riverside, or the global television broadcast of the Crystal Cathedral, or the amazing arts programs at St. Bart's in New York, the common thread is a willingness to take risks in order to create something wonderful and beautiful and inviting that will attract more people and empower more people and equip more people to be ministers of kindness and hope and healing in the world.

Today's parable isn't about our use of money, though there are plenty of scriptures that call us to trust God with our finances and to worship God with our consistent generosity. And, today's parable isn't about using our skills to benefit our community with the promise that our using our skills will sharpen them, even though we know that to be a true statement. This parable is about Sharing the Light of God that is within us.

How do we share the light? With an amazing organ concert last week! With a Holiday Concert and live Nativity on December 7<sup>th</sup>. With Light University classes. With a Knabe piano, a Rogers organ with Ruffatti pipes, with a band and choir, with internet broadcasting, with a website, with a campus that provides a home to 25 organizations, with collecting food for two pantries in our county, with providing a place where counseling services and senior services are offered, with ministry to assisted living facilities and prisons, with our prayer list, and dynamic worship services, and weekly, monthly, and quarterly publications. Is it over the top? Is it too much? My God I hope so...because in a world where there is so much loneliness and pain and discrimination and fear...our calling is to be nothing less than TOO MUCH!

Because you know what? There's no such thing as too much good news! What can we do to invite more people into a life of hope and joy? What can we do to help people celebrate their wholeness? What can we do to be a shining light far beyond the reach of our immediate sphere of influence? Whatever it is, let's do it! God's goodness is without limitation. We dare not bury our divine light in the ground, or stuff it in a mattress, or hide it under a bushel basket. Divine Love is opulent, extravagant, abundant...how else could it leave no one out? We can't bury our talent, that is, we

can't hide our divine currency, the currency of hope and joy and celebration...we are meant to spread it around. That's the message Matthew so dramatically shares with us today. In God's economy, there is grace and love and hope enough for every single person. It isn't our job to hide, defend, protect, or minimize God...it is our job to spread God's Light around, with as much enthusiasm and far reaching capabilities as possible. We've been given this divine trust...This is the good news. Amen.

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**I will not hide my joy.  
I will not bury my hope.  
I WILL share my light gladly!  
I WILL manifest God's goodness.  
I expect and accept blessings now...  
And I spread the blessings around.  
Amen.**

Life coach and motivational speaker Susan Rabin encourages us by saying,  
"Enthusiasm is contagious. Be a carrier."