



Multiply!
“GOOD JOB!”

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Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. Then 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.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ And 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.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ Then 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; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For 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. As for this worthless servant, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Once upon a time a man worked hard every day of his life, which left him feeling entitled to the money he had earned. He felt no desire to give it away. He wanted to keep it for himself. So when it came time for him to ask a dying wish, he asked his wife to bury him with the remainder of his money. She wasn’t into the idea of granting him his miserly wish, so she came up with another brilliant idea.

She wrote, "There was a man who worked all of his life and saved all of his money. He was a real cheapskate when it came to his money. He loved money more than just about anything, and just before he died he said to me, 'Now listen to me. When I die I want you to take all my money and place it in the casket with me. I want to take all my money to the afterlife.'"

His wife promised him that she would bury him with all his money in the casket. And then he died. After the funeral was over and they went to the cemetery for the burial, the undertakers were beginning to close the casket. His wife shouted out, "Wait a minute!" She had a shoebox with her, and she placed it in the casket. Then the casket was lowered into the ground. Her friends said to her, "I hope you weren't crazy enough to put all that money in there with that stingy old man."

She said, "Yes. I promised. I'm a good Christian. I can't lie. I promised him I would put his money in the casket." "You mean to tell me you put every cent of his in that casket with him?" "I sure did. I got it all together, put it into my account, and I wrote him a check."

What is God calling you and me to do with our resources? Sometimes we get so wrapped up in what is ours, and our stuff becomes so much a part of our identity, that we hide it, we hoard it, we insist on preserving it. And we miss the point of having resources, whether it's money, time or talent. On the other hand, to share our resources is to multiply what God has given us in order to change the world.

One day this summer, a cyclist passed me on my early morning run and said enthusiastically, "Good job!" She didn't have a clue who I was, and it was obvious I wasn't an Olympic athlete. She understood, however, that it takes effort, discipline and perseverance to get out there and exercise. I'm sure she was encouraging everyone she passed that day. That's what athletes do. They're always telling each other, "Good job!"

Whenever we hear the words, "Good job!" it makes us feel good, doesn't it? And so we try to say the words "Good job" to others as often as possible, don't we? When someone does well on a presentation, we say, "Good job, Alice!" When our child has the courage to participate in a piano recital, we say, "Good job, Alex!" When a youth in the church decides to help with Vacation Bible School, we say, "Good job, Hannah!" When our congregation makes a heroic effort to respond quickly to a great need, we say, "Good job, friends!" When someone with cancer keeps fighting despite round after round of chemotherapy, we say, "Good job, Lucy!" When a baby takes his first step, we say "Good job, Jackson!"

I want you to turn to two other people right now and say, "Good job!" along with their name. And if you don't know them, ask their name!

Are you aware that God says "Good job!" to you and me every day of our lives? God is so proud of us. God knows that we can be great people. God sees only the possibilities and encourages us to risk being fully human.

But what exactly does it mean when God says "Good job!"? The biblical version of "Good job" is, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We find those words in the parable of the talents in

Matthew 25. Many of you know the story. The master is going on a journey and gives his property to his servants. He entrusts them with huge amounts, symbolic of God's extravagant grace. A talent was equivalent to fifteen years of wages for a day laborer. The master knows how much each of them can handle and gives them five, two and one talent respectively.

What the master wants is for the servants to do business with the talents. Like maybe multiply and make disciples. The first two servants go off and double what they've been given, but the third guy's afraid he'll blow it, so he hides his talent in the ground. When he returns, the master is very pleased with the first two servants and says, "Good job! Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master. Join me in the kingdom of heaven."

But what does the third servant do? He blames his master. He doesn't see receiving one talent as an honor but as a terrifying responsibility or maybe even a put down. He's stuck in the present, perhaps feeling victimized, unaware of his potential, without any vision for doing business or making disciples. Or maybe he does what many of us do when we're scared or uncertain: we hunker down and hoard what we have.

Does the master say "Good job!" this time? Nope. He says, according to Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, "That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest. So take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this 'play-it-safe' (guy) who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness."

Do you ever bury your talents? Does low self-esteem prevent you from claiming and using your gifts? Does fear paralyze your generosity? Does an obsession with security cause you to cling to what you have when, in reality, we end up multiplying faith in ourselves and others when we share what we have?

Of course, this parable is not ultimately just about money. It's about multiplying our faith by making disciples for the transformation of our world. As United Methodists, that's our mission as followers of Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter whether we're five, two or one talent people. Until we realize our need and the world's need for a Savior and share the love of Jesus, we cannot be God's instruments of grace and peace.

Look around you. I'd like you to look around you right now. God has given all of us different abilities and talents as individuals and churches. Do you see anyone here who is just like you? Of course not. We're one body of Christ, but not a one of us is alike, even if you a twin, a triplet or a quad!

Are all churches like Birmingham? Of course not. Thank God! We certainly are unique among United Methodist churches in our state. However, every Christian church in our world is filled with the Holy Spirit, and whenever we multiply our faith by making a disciple, whether by verbally sharing our faith, taking a pie to our neighbor, visiting a friend in the hospital, inviting a colleague to church or serving food in a soup kitchen, God says, "Good job, Jean! Good job, Ted! Enter into the joy of your master!"

At the same time, “Good job!” is both an affirmation and a challenge, isn’t it? Look at the one talent man. He wasn’t evil. At least he protected his investment. Yet he was condemned for his fearful inactivity, for dwelling on what he didn’t have rather than the gifts he did have. If you and I sit on our faith and protect it without using it, without risking, without changing, we’re not offering a Savior, we’re not multiplying our faith, and we’re not transforming the world. When it comes to faithfulness, holding our own is not enough in today’s world. Use it or lose it, right?

We are all in this together at First Church. We are in a time of transition with Pastor Chad leaving and waiting for the appointment of a new pastor for Shine. Yet we continue to step up and multiply. So I want to say to each one of you this morning, “Good job!”

There is so much talent among our pastors and lay people. You know your need of a Savior and are not hiding your talents in the ground. Neither are you keeping your rummage in your garages. You’re getting ready to share it with this community and the world in just a week. Some of you may commit to be a part of the new worshiping community in Berkley. You’re giving yourself away. The rest of us will pray for Berkley and our new pastor, Zack Dunlap, who is here with us this morning to preach at the Shine service. Please make a point to greet him after the service or at the soup lunch.

As we expand our footprint we are only gaining, not losing, for we have committed ourselves to spreading the gospel into the Berkley area by making disciples. At the same time, we’re not going to diminish in any way what happens on this campus. We are all going to become stronger, for we are one in our commitment to multiply what we have.

“Good job” is more than a warm feeling. It’s also a challenge, for we have some work ahead of us. We need to have a good stewardship campaign. Why? Because we’re funding ministries that make disciples and make a difference. But more important, we need to increase the number of people who choose to be a part of First United Methodist Church. Why? Because so many people today are looking for a place to experience God’s presence and redeem their deep pain and hurt. They’re looking for a place where others will empower them to examine their lives and multiply their talents. They’re looking for a place where they can study the Bible and learn the language of faith so they can share it with others. They’re looking for a place to make a positive difference in the world. Most of all, they’re looking for a place where someone will offer grace and say to them, “Good job!” All over this area, people are yearning for us to open our doors. And when we minister out of abundance rather than scarcity, anything is possible! What talents are you using to glorify God? And what talents are you burying in the ground?

If you’re a golfer or like to watch golf, you may remember a touching story from this past August when a professional golfer on the web.com tour hit a ball into the water during the first round of the WinCo Foods Portland Open. Peter Malnati is a very upbeat, positive player even though he didn’t play well quite enough last year to make it to the PGA tour.

The ball is in the water about a foot or so from the edge, so Malnati takes off his shoes and socks, rolls up his khaki pants and takes a firm stance in the water. The TV commentators are having a field day with Malnati, saying this shot could be a lot of fun. At the very least, he’ll get

mud all over his clothes. As I'm watching this unfold, I'm willing Malnati to hit the ball out, saying, "Good job, Peter! Go for it!"

What happens? Malnati takes a big swing and ends up popping the ball a few feet in the air. Then the ball rolls right back in the water again. Malnati is stunned and shouts, "Are you kidding me? All that for that?" And I say again, "Good job, Peter, because you took a risk. You didn't leave your ball buried in the water. You went for it. Next time you'll make it."

I guarantee you Peter Malnati will be remembered more his priceless reaction to his attempt to get out of the water than for any other brilliant shots he will ever make in his career. Malnati said earlier in the summer, "I really do believe in my work ethic... There are times when I doubt my talent or my natural ability... (But) I can do everything I need to do to be successful. I just need to believe in it." Does that remind you of a biblical passage? Philippians 4:13? "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." By the way, Peter Malnati did earn his PGA Tour card for the 2015-2016 season.

All that for that? Do you ever doubt your talent? Are you going to have all your money put in your casket when you die? Do you ever wonder if anything we do here at First Church counts for anything? Yet for every single time you give someone a hug, listen to someone's pain, make a meal, give away a homemade dress in Haiti, shelter someone who has no home, write an encouraging note, say a prayer; every time you do something to build God's kingdom on this earth, Jesus says, "Good job! Well done, good and faithful servant." What will you do with your talents?