

Use It Or Lose It
Genesis 4:1-7 - Matthew 25: 14-30
Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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This morning I'm going to preach a stewardship sermon, but you can let go of your wallets and purses, because I'm not going to be asking, "**How are you spending your money ?**" Instead, I'll be asking, "**How are you spending your life?**"

Question, if you are gifted in a particular way (and believe me, you are gifted in at least one particular way), but you never exercise your gift, isn't that a terrible waste? Aren't you frustrated when you see someone squander a life that can be so much better than it is?

If, so, maybe you can better understand the punch line of Jesus' parable. The master entrusted his slaves with his property. By the way, that's what God does with us. God entrusts you with your gifts and talents. They are loaned to you with the expectation that you will use them the best way you can.

A college professor said to his star pupil, "**You are a very gifted young man.**" "**Thank you sir,**" he replied with a look of pride in his face. "**Why are you thanking me? I simply stated the obvious, it wasn't a compliment. You are gifted. You haven't anything to do with it. You didn't make these gifts, they were given to you. I'll compliment you, years from now after I see what you have done with your gifts to make a better world.**"

Getting back to the parable, the Master was angry with his third slave because instead of taking a risk like the other two, he dug a hole and hid his talent in the ground. Why? Listen to his excuse. "**I was afraid.**"

Don't conclude since this third slave was given only one talent he was being compared with the slave given five and the other slave given two. If the third slave took his one talent, invested it and lost it, I'm sure the Master would have been disappointed, but not angry. "**Well, at least you tried.**" You see, that's the key. "**At least you tried.**" If you give life your best shot, and fall flat on your face, who can blame you? "**You're not defeated if you fail. You're defeated if you quit.**"

So you are faithful with your gifts if you do the best you can with what you've got.

That's why a lot of us say "**No**" when we are faced with an opportunity that means risking yourself and changing and growing. We like ourselves just the way we, so why take a chance?

Listen to this story. Instead of saying "**no**" to an opportunity our hero refused to quit, took a risk and won big time.

A high school sophomore had his dream come true. The girl we had a crush on invited him to her junior prom. He was on cloud nine, until he realized he had no transportation. All his friends with driver's licenses were already double dating with those who didn't. This was embarrassing. Would he call off the date? No. He took a risk and got creative. He remembered his grandfather had a big shiny black car. On his way to his grandfather's house, he stopped at a pawn shop and bought a chauffeur's hat. Somehow, he persuaded his grandfather to put on a black suit, tie and the cap, and be his chauffeur for the night, not telling anyone that his driver was his grandfather. It worked

perfectly with his grandfather saying, **Yes sir, Mr. Johnson,**" as he opened and closed the car door. Jeff's date was impressed and so were his friends. He even started a trend at his school, hiring limos for prom night.

So here is an example of how you can use your talents to the best of your ability. Our Prom King started out with nothing but a crazy idea and the courage to make it into reality.

Are you working with what you have and making the most of it?

That's like asking who is most like you, the slaves who invested their talents, or the one who hid it in the ground.

If you're like me, you're probably a little of both. Sometimes you answer the call to stand up and be counted, other times you hide yourself as best you can, hoping no one will find you.

Of course, God always knows where you are and what you're up to, and a lot of times you know too. Deep down you know when you're doing your best, you know when you're coasting and you know when you're dead in the water.

So, the question today is this: "What are you going to do about it?" How are you going to justify yourself when you stand before God and he asks, "**How did you spend your life?**"

To help you jump start your prayerful contemplation let me suggest something. If you are serious about being a good steward of your life and really want to make a difference for good in this world, then simply begin with this: ask God to show you the way. Ask God to motivate you. This is surely an opportunity to see if God is serious when he says "**Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find.**"

So, begin by asking God to place in your heart a real desire to serve, in your family, in your community and in your church. I guarantee you, if you ask God to change you, it will happen in God's time and in God's way.

And, really that's the beauty of your discipleship. God will change you, grow you and enable you to be the best you can as a steward of your gifts and talents. You aren't expected to manufacture these gifts on your own. God has already given them to you, and part of your journey with Jesus is to discover your talent and then use it.

One of the reasons Christians come together in community is to help each other realize our potential and be the best you can be for God.

When you joined this church, this is where God called you to exercise your gifts. In a sense, God planted you here so you can grow in your love for God and your neighbor, and one way you can express your love is to use your talents.

The second half of Matthew 25 is the parable of the last judgment. You remember it. God's people ask God, "**When was it when we saw you, when you were hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you drink, when did we welcome you, clothe you and visit you?**" And Jesus replied, "**Whatever you did for the least of these, you also did it to me.**"

God called you here to worship and serve Jesus. We have a great church here. We have all the gifts and talents we need to be successful. God is accomplishing so much here through you, and there's more to do.

So open yourself up to the Spirit. Be changed, grow, come to full flavor, be your best, do your best, for Jesus, your neighbor and yourself.

Let us pray!