

Today's gospel parable tells of a rich man with three servants. The wealthy fellow was about to go away on a long journey, so he called his servants to him. To the first one, he gave a lot of money; five "talents." Let me tell you right here that we are talking about major money, big bucks - a lotto win. A talent in our Lord's time was a weight of money, because all money was in the form of a single coin of the realm. A talent of coins weighted about seventy-five pounds. A single talent would represent about fourteen years of one man's common labor. Five talents represented more money than a worker would gain in a lifetime.

Jesus said that the rich man, in this story, gave one servant five talents, another got two talents and the third guy got one. He gave them the money and said take care of this for me while I am gone. In due course, the rich man returned. He called his servants to him and said, "Give me an accounting of what you did with my money."

The guy with five talents said, "Boss, I made you five more by using it wisely. Here's the ten that I owe you." The guy with two talents said, "Well boss, in a way I did as good as the first guy. I doubled your money, too. Here are the four talents that I owe you." The third guy said, "Master, I know how demanding you are and I wasn't about to take the foolish risks these others did with your money. I hid it so that I'd be sure to have it when you got back." The master said, "You turkey. At a minimum you could have put it in the bank and earned a little interest." With that, he took the talent from him and gave it to the guy that made ten out of five.

Then he said to the first two servants, "Well done, guys. You've proved to me that you've got what it takes. I'm proud of you and you will reap the benefits of my joy." The third guy said, what about me?" "Forget it," the rich man said. You are so inept that I'm firing you, to boot. Beat it, you worthless bum."

Well, I've paraphrased this gospel passage just a little, but I did it to fix the story and its content firmly in your minds. Only then can you really hear the parting words of Jesus. "To everyone who has, more will be given; from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

These are harsh words, and harsher yet, to our ears, when we realize that these talents represent, in this parable, God's grace. To understand it, we have to set aside the inequality of it all. Theologians have noticed the inequality, and often tapped danced around what to do with this parable. But, the reality is that when we look at the world about us we realize that some people seem to have a greater share of God's grace than others, just as some clearly have a greater share of the material world than others. Like it or not, inequality is what it often is about. Some people are just born healthier than others. Some come from greater wealth and have a substantial head start on the important things in life. Some are smarter than others, while some people just seem to be born utter fools. Why, we don't know. God's ways are not our ways. We also note that

some people really seem to have a greater share of God's grace than others. Theologians fail to come up with an explanation of the apparent differences in grace, except to say that the greater the grace the greater God's expectations of us. Regardless, what matters is what we do with the grace and love we receive, and the way that we multiply it and make it grow is by spreading it by loving others.

What does all this mean for us today? I think that it addresses our Christian responsibility to the world about us, reminding us that we are obliged, as Christians, to spread the realm of God in this world with our love, to the best of our ability. God gives generously to us in myriad ways: talents, skills, opportunities, the capacity for empathy and understanding. God also, I believe, gives us our material wealth. At least we say this often at the offertory, if we are not singing the doxology. "All things come of thee, O Lord; and of thine own have we given thee." God expects us to use what he gives us wisely, to his glory, so that through our lives and our works God's world becomes a better place. And, I think that a reality of Christianity is that God does hold us accountable for how we live our lives. We must face him on our day of judgment and give an accounting of what we have done with the grace he gave us in our redemption.

There are no easy answers to the questions of life. What we have is a Christian expectation that we do what we can to live the life God has given us to the fullest, loving God, loving neighbor, walking in righteousness and justice. At the end of the day, if we have done that, we have done all that God requires. *Amen.*