

“The Realm of God is Like a Risky Investment” by Peter Bankson

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A Sermon for Covenant Christian Community Church

INTRODUCTION

Good morning. It is a privilege for me to share this time of worship with you.

Last spring, when Reverend Lola signed up for a class in our [School of Christian Living](#) it felt like a new chapter in our life as a faith community. Oh, in the past we have welcomed folks to our school who were not part of our worshiping community, but when you came here to be with us on Tuesday evenings it felt like a **real** welcome to our new home. Now you are sharing our space. Thanks be to God!

This morning I want to offer a few reflections on a familiar story from the Gospel of Saint Matthew – the one usually called parable of the talents. I chose this because in Seekers Church, our tradition is to base our daily Bible study and weekly sermons on the lectionary used by many churches of

different denominations and this is the Gospel lesson for this week. Sharing these readings with many other congregations gives us a sense that even though we are not affiliated formally with these other churches, we can choose to walk together. Moreover, because we have a different preacher each week, the lectionary gives us some continuity from week to week, and a way to know what Scripture will be coming up in the weeks to come.

SCRIPTURE

In Matthew 25:14-30 Jesus is giving one of his many lessons about the nature of the “kingdom of God.” This translation is from “The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language.”

[The realm of God is] “... like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master’s investment. The second did the same. However, the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master’s money.

“After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: ‘Good work! You did your job well. From now on, be my partner.’

“The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had

doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The servant given one thousand said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid to disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound, down to the last cent.'

"The master was furious. ' That is a terrible way to live! It is 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.'

"'Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. Moreover, get rid of this "play-it-safe" who will not go out on a limb. Throw him into utter darkness.'"

THE REALM OF GOD IS LIKE A RISKY INVESTMENT

In this story, Jesus says that, among many other things, the realm of God is like a risky investment:

Talents are distributed differently – like the fruits of the Spirit

Some of us use what we have been given and others protect it. God much prefers our risking to our protecting.

I do not know about you, but the idea of a “risky investment” sends me running for cover. I came from a family that had enough, but the experience of my parents through the Great Depression gave them a sense of caution when it came to investments. I remember once in the 1970’s when my dad, disregarding his own rules, invested a few thousand dollars in a software development initiative to develop an automated billing system for dentists. However, in 1974, most dentists were satisfied to pay a clerk to do that job and there was not much of a market for the software. The software developer went bankrupt and my dad lost his investment. He vowed, “I’ll never do **that** again!” and went to his grave convinced that he had made a mistake investing in that venture.

Like my dad, I have been careful, but there is a small, woman-owned, publishing business that we invested in, about ten years ago. She had a clear vision and has done good work. Nevertheless, the publishing business is going through **huge** changes and she is on the verge of declaring bankruptcy. My wife and I stand to “lose” many times more than my father lost.

When I learned about the bankruptcy, I checked my inner voices, expecting to hear a critical spirit like the one I saw in my dad. Surprisingly, what I felt was that this was a noble venture and frankly, I am glad we did what we did – to support the call of someone who was committed to publishing books that would help break down the lingering prejudices against women

and their life journeys. It is not the result that I hoped for, but I am not angry about it.

Do not get me wrong, this is not the outcome that Jesus describes. Jesus does not talk about what would have happened in the Realm of God if one of the trusted servants had invested his five thousand dollars in a venture that went bankrupt! That, as we say, is left for us to ponder!

Even so, making “risky investments” is not easy for us. Yet this is just what Jesus says the Realm of God is like: “It is criminal to live cautiously like that! [Burying what God has given you.] If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least?”

The first thing I want to offer this morning is this: The realm of God is like a risky investment. Jesus calls us to invest our talents and bring in a return on our investment.

THE REALM OF GOD HAS DIVERSITY

In Seekers Church this season, our worship is focused on the understanding that the city of God – or the ‘realm’ or the ‘kindom’ of God is nearby – among us and around us. We have been using a responsive reading that helps us remember that there are many parables about what the city of God is like, and they describe a world with lots of diversity: The parable of the Talents is the 17th parable in The Gospel of Matthew alone! Each parable describes **something** about the realm of God, but each one is different. I think it is important to recognize that there is some truth in each of these, **and** that

their diversity is a distinct, important message as well. This says to me that there are lots of ways to look at the realm of God; there are lots of ways to think about what it means that Christ is risen and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow the path Jesus set for us: to preach Good News to the Poor, to reach out to those in need, to live our lives so that we really are Good News to others. What does this mean – for US, living in Washington DC, in 2005, in the middle of all the trials and tribulations that w