

## **Reflection for Pentecost 25 by Rev'd Peter Shaw**

Today's Bible reading is about the master who was going on a journey. He put his three servants in charge of his property. He was a very wise and understanding man, committing to each what he knew they were able to manage.

We sometimes misunderstand this parable, imagining that the master has shown different degrees of generosity to the three servants. Generosity doesn't come into it. The money is still the master's. It is not "given" in an absolute sense so that it now belongs to them. It would be truer to the Greek original to say that it was "committed" to them. Each of them understood this and returned the money (including the total earned) on their master's return.

The difference between the three servants lies in what they did with what they had received. The first, we are told, "invested his money and earned another five thousand [silver coins]." We are not told how he "invested" it. The original simply says that he "put it to work", which suggests more than we might imply by a simple investment. It may have been in running a business, planting a crop... - any one of a number of ways in which money can be put to work to generate an income. The second servant did the same.

The third servant, however, buried his master's money, so it would be safe and he could return it to him later.

"After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them." He called them in and wanted to know that they had been dealing responsibly with his money.

We note that none of them had acted dishonestly. None had grabbed the money as his own and gone off on a trip to Hawaii... The first was able to bring ten thousand silver coins - the original entrusted to him plus his earnings.

"Well done, you good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness!" The second servant received exactly the same commendation.

The third brought back the original thousand coins with the explanation, "Sir, I know you are a hard man; you reap harvests where you did not sow, and you gather crops where you did not scatter seed. I was afraid, so I went off and hid your money in the ground. Look! Here is what belongs to you."

One writer sees a remarkable parallel between this and Jesus' first parable - the parable of the sower (or the different soils). "He looks for fruit where he has sown - this is truth: but not beyond the power of the soil by him enabled - this is man's lie, to encourage himself in idleness" (H.Alford). In fact, it is not that the master is "a hard man" at all, but that the other is "a wicked and lazy servant." The master rightly expected his money to be put to work. At the very least it should have been deposited in the bank so there would have been interest on his return.

The thousand coins are taken from the third servant and given to the first. This illustrates the principle, "For to every person who has something, even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him." It is a principle from the physical world that a limb that isn't used will become weak, whereas one that is worked will become strong. These days, with knee replacement surgery, they even have machines to help ensure that the work of restoring

movement and strength to the knee takes place. This same principle applies in the spiritual world as well.

### Our Stewardship

An anonymous writer has said, "My small son and I were taking a walk. In the far corner of the field we found a small patch of beautiful and fragrant flowers. They were in the middle of weeds, almost completely hidden and unnoticed, yet these flowers were blooming in full beauty and we sensed their fresh fragrance. All of us have met persons unnoticed by many, but who in the middle of struggle and unlikely surroundings far from the centre of attention, live lives of beauty and fragrance. And living lives which seemed obscure they faithfully fulfilled God's calling for them. God's question on the last day will not be, 'How much were you noticed?' or even 'How much did you do?' Rather, his question will be, 'Were you faithful in fulfilling your calling where I placed you?' "

How much of what God owns has he entrusted to you? Don't protest, "But it's mine! I worked hard for it! It's all mine!" Remember the parable. The first and second servants (but not the third) worked hard to gain the extra money, but they didn't forget that it belonged to their master - principal and interest - what was first committed to them and the fruit of their planning and sweat. The third servant knew it was all the master's too - and gave his master nothing of himself.

Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians, "You do not belong to yourselves but to God; he bought you with a price. So use your bodies (all that you are and have) for God's glory" (1 Cor.6.19b-20).

Not one of us here owns anything in an absolute sense. At best we can be faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to us by God himself. Only God is an owner in the absolute sense and not one of us here is God. But he calls each of us as Christians to be his representative in the part of the world where we live.

At the end of 1 Chronicles we read of the death of King David. Before he dies David announces that a Temple to the Lord will be built during the reign of his son Solomon. He calls on the people to bring their gifts for this work. We read that there was great happiness because the people had given so much so willingly.

Then, in front of the whole assembly, King David praises the Lord, "Lord God of our ancestor Jacob, may you be praised for ever and ever! You are great and powerful, glorious, splendid and majestic. Everything in heaven and earth is yours, and you are king, supreme ruler over all. All riches and wealth come from you; you rule over everything by your strength and power; and you are able to make anyone great and strong. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and we praise your glorious name. Yet my people and I cannot really give you anything, because everything is a gift from you, and we have only given back what is yours already..." (1 Chron.29.10b-14).

They had grasped what stewardship is all about. May we know it too - and discover the joy of giving back freely to the Lord what is his anyway and furthering the Good News that He has for everyone in the process!

**AMEN**