

Investment Advice—Matthew 25: 14-30
(November 19, 2017-24th Sunday after Pentecost)

Have you ever worked in a C.Y.A. organization? Do you know what I mean by that? Cover your backside. C.Y.A. organizations are dominated by fear—the fear of making a mistake, of stepping on toes. The kind of organization where you document everything carefully, monitor what you say and take as few risks as possible. I’ve worked for an organization like this, it’s a soul crushing environment. In these kinds of organizations it’s all about survival, it’s all about covering your backside.

C.Y.A. seems to be the experience of the third slave in our faith story from Matthew. He is scared of the master, scared of his power; he has heard things about his master’s business reputation, a reputation that shows a man singly focused on maximizing profit, not caring much for the rules and limitations put on him by others. So when the master goes away and entrusts the slave with some of the master’s money he is gripped by fear. Succumbing to his anxiety he buries the money and gives it back. In effect he says, “Your money will be the cause of my downfall, I want nothing to do with you or it.” In the midst of his fear he rejects the trust and the freedom that the master had given him. Better to play it safe—C.Y.A., cover your backside.

Covering your backside doesn’t cut it with the master in our story. Matthew is the gospel of accountability. He is always asking, “What have you done with what God has given you?” I am glad his is not the only gospel we have. I am glad we also have Luke’s gospel where God is always calling and reaching out to us. I like the way American Episcopal Preacher Barbara Brown Taylor puts it when she says, if Matthew and Luke both had churches in her home town, she would attend Luke’s church. We need the grace of Luke to comfort and re-assure us that we are not alone in this, but we also need the accountability of Matthew to remind us that grace requires a response from us. The master had given much; he entrusted his money and given his slaves the freedom to do with it what they needed in order to grow the investment and in the process enrich the master. Now it was time to see what the slaves had done with what they had been given. Of course he is pleased with the boldness and adventurousness of the first two. They embraced both the gift and the freedom and in the process doubled the investment for the master.

Usually with this parable we get caught up in the injustice we perceive in the master’s treatment of the third slave, but notice what he says: “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. (v. 27)” The beginning of the scripture makes it quite clear that the master is aware of his servants’ limitations; he entrusts each one with his money according to their abilities (v. 15) The master doesn’t expect the same of the third slave as he did of the first two, he gave him less money. Perhaps he was aware of that slave’s timidity and fear. The master expected the third slave to do something safe with the money, but to do nothing at all was an affront and an insult to the trust the master had placed in his slave. The master knows that the slave is capable of so much more. Covering your backside doesn’t cut it with the master.

Covering your backside doesn’t cut it in life either. We are entrusted, each one of us with a life and the freedom to invest our lives by taking risks so that God might be glorified through our living, so that in our lives others may see the face of God, so that

other may see His will and Her kingdom on earth as in heaven. The relationship of faith makes us accountable for what we do with this gift that has been entrusted to us; covering your backside doesn't cut. The danger here is to engage in the comparison game. Perhaps you start comparing yourself to those who have taken great risks in the name of faith, you begin to feel inadequate and faith becomes a burden. As an idealist my mind goes to people like Jean Vanier, Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, and Arch Bishop Oscar Romero. But we don't have to try to imitate others to glorify God. There is good news in this scripture; God knows what we are capable of, our abilities and limitations. I believe it was Martin Luther King Jr. who said; "Not all of us are called upon to do great things, but all of us are called upon to do small things greatly." The Holy One calls us only to our potential, but won't let us settle for anything less though.

During the late summer of 2007, in his 11th year my son Calvin attended a hockey camp. He was there with dozens of other kids, there was nothing spectacular about it, except for the fact that Calvin was struggling with his balance, dealing with double vision and trying to compensate for weakness on the left side of his body. You see only ten months previous Andrea and I said a painful goodbye to Calvin, just before he was wheeled into surgery to remove a brain tumour. As he left us we were well aware it might be our last moment with him. Calvin made a lot of mistakes that day; he was far from being the best player on the ice. But to Andrea and I Calvin was embracing the gift of life that God had given him, returning to God tenfold what had been entrusted to him and glorifying God through his young life.

In the midst of our own particular circumstances there is a holy call urging us to embrace life. The crocus comes up out of the ground through the February and March snows, but God doesn't expect the same of the lily or the tulip. In the midst of a deep depression it might just be enough to get out of bed and have a shower. Bent under the weight of grief it might just be enough to make a proper meal and take care of our bodies. Unable to solve a friend's emotional pain it might just be enough to bring them a meal, rub their feet or simply be present to them in silence. In all these acts we take the gift of life and we magnify the investment God has made in us and in the process God is glorified.

In God's great gift of freedom a choice is required on our part, it is the choice She gives Israel in the book of Deuteronomy: "life and death have I set before you, choose life so that you and your children may live." In the week to come I invite you to consider how you might risk a little more with the life you've been given. Ask, "what holds me back?" "What support might I need?" The grace that scripture promises us is a future where we will enter into the joy of the master (v. 23)—the joy of a life fully lived. May we be blessed us with the courage, the wisdom, the support and the faith to live into this promise. May it be so. Amen.

Rev. Joe Gaspar