



## **D.C. Alumni Mass and Brunch at the home of Linda and Stan '58 Glod**

November 16, 2008

### **Matt 25:14-30**

“To one he gave five talents. To another, two. To a third, one. To each according to his ability.”

My friend, a Bishop, came to South Florida to lead a retreat. He came back and said, “They see everything as a moral challenge!” He talked about the difficulties they were having working together. He talked about their petty issues. He talked about how that all came as a result of their moral judgments -- and he was leading a retreat for a group of religious men!

I have been thinking about the differences in people lately, and was reminded of that as I read our scripture for today. So, let me explain what that Bishop meant. He was actually talking about the differences that can make it difficult for any couple, family, or community.

Here’s my list of differences at my house. See if you recognize any at yours:

1. Some want to greet the morning with all the lights on in a blaze. Others want to start out slowly and work their way up to the brightness of day.
2. Some want to begin the day with conversation. Others would like to read the paper over breakfast and limit conversation.
3. Some think best when the room is cool and they can move around without breaking into a sweat. Others expect warmth and are concerned that they will shiver to death when seated.
4. Some think TV time is conversation time. Others think *Law and Order* should have everyone’s undivided attention.
5. Some think all people are hard of hearing...I have a hard time with that at the end of my day.
6. And my favorite...they don’t turn off the dishwasher.

I had fun drawing up that list, but seriously....

Understanding our differences can make us more powerful.

On campus, a recent guest speaker for our Entrepreneurs Association told a story from

the great baseball player, Ted Williams's autobiography. Ted Williams was one of the great hitters of all time. That was not the case in the beginning of his career. Williams relates that he followed the conventional coaching for hitters and was ok. Then Williams analyzed his hitting and discovered that what was best for him did not match that advice. He was different. The "sweet spot" for his hitting or, as he called it, "the happy zone," was different. He went on to become one of the greatest hitters of all time.

But think now about our scripture and what it says to us.

First, the Master gives them different talents to manage. The English language permits a play on words here; the word "talent" is a homograph -- a word that can have different meanings. One meaning that I would like to use is the concept of talents as a gift or ability -- something that has the possibility of setting us apart from others. A second meaning of talent is the explanation in Matthew of talent as a measure of money.

God has given us different gifts and abilities -- and they may not be equal, but that's not the point.

One servant was expected to manage five talents -- \$1.65 million. Another was expected to manage \$666,000, and the third, \$330,000. Not a shabby amount for anyone. I describe the dollar amount so that we understand what the listener in Jesus' day understood. All three, including the one who received the least, had a gift that could be useful. All three servants had the wherewithal or opportunity to accomplish something for their Master.

They could have invested in Bear Stearns!

The second reminder from this scripture is that Jesus expects us to be doers. The sin of the third servant is, not that he failed; it is that he did nothing with what he had been given. He hid what he had been given. He put it away.

The story is told that when the famous violinist Niccolò Paganini died, he willed his violin to the city of Genoa, Italy. He did it with one stipulation, that it not be played. Without use, the violin over time became dust. Compare that to a Stradivarius. Violins from this famous maker have provided the world with rich music for 300 years. Because they are played, they have actually appreciated in quality of sound as well as value and continue to be cherished. They are not dust to be swept away.

Think about your own life. Is there a skill that you had at one time and have neglected? I suspect that if I were to ask for a show of hands, I would find someone who took piano lessons but now cannot play ... someone who took a language, was proud of their ability to communicate in that language, but recognizes with regret that they have lost that ability. I caved to my mother's desire for me to take tap dancing lessons -- for a while!

God calls us to be doers for Him with the talents that we have been given. We may lose those talents, or to use the harsh description of the Bible – they will be taken away from us.

As I think about these three servants, I am also reminded that we are called to take a risk with our lives. When the servant says that he hid the talent so as not to lose it, his excuse is unacceptable. He should not have buried his gifts.

The Master expected them to take risk: To be productive with what they had received.

When I think of risk takers, I have to think of Francis Xavier, the great Jesuit teacher and traveler -- a missionary to the world. When setting off for India, his companion fell ill; Xavier did not turn back from the unknown, even though it meant he would be alone. Upon learning that there was no one to travel with him, he replied “Good enough, I’m ready.”

Are we ready to say that? To stop making excuses? To take a risk? To use those talents that make us different and say, “Good enough, I’m ready.”

Note: A talent would be an amount equal to about 1/3 of a million dollars in today’s money (6,000 days’ pay X \$6.55 minimum wage X 8 hours = \$314,400).