

"TREASURED RELICS"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
November 14th, 1993

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INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by asking you a question. If you were asked to buy the tackiest gift imaginable, what would you end up buying? Martin Marty, for a number of years the Editor of The Christian Century (the highly popular journal for many Christian) was once invited to a post-nuptial party and was asked to bring along "a gift in the worst possible taste". The purpose was to have some fun and perhaps embarrass a newly married couple. They would open their gifts standing in front of family and friends and "ooh" and "aah" as they opened each gift, each "tacky item". And with a serious face they would have to say something like "oh...just what we needed".

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And those at the White Elephant table next Saturday at our church fair should remember this that "Grunge is in" And everything can be sold".

DEVELOPMENT

Now, what we do with what we have been given says much about our understanding of faith.

Think of it this way, if you will. God has given each of us a gold coin. And it's our choice as to how we are going to spend it. We can spend it on junk, "Grunge is in". Or, we can spend it on ourselves. Or, we can go out and bury it in the ground, or we can invest it in something greater than ourselves, something like the Kingdom of God. Which is it going to be?

Once upon a time there was a wealthy landowner, or "master" as he is spoken of in Matthew's Gospel, who was about to go on a long trip. And since he was going away for such a long time he decided to put his loyal staff in charge of everything he owned. Does it sound familiar? It should. It was read for our Scripture...but let me go over it with you.

Before he left he presented one of the servants with the unbelievable sum of five talents. To another servant he gave two talents and to the third servant he gave one talent. The servants weren't given any instructions on what to do with the talents or when exactly the landowner would return.

A talent was a tremendous sum of money. It represented the earnings of twenty or more years. The servant who was given five talents held in his possession the earnings of five persons' lifetimes. The servant who was given two talents had the earnings of two people. Even the servant who was given only one talent had an enormous sum of money.

Immediately after the master left on his trip the first two servants went to work. The one with the five talents and the one with two talents soon had doubled the money of their master. The third servant who was given one talent, however, "went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money".

At an unexpected time the master returned and called in his three servants to give an account of how each had used the talents entrusted to him..

EACH OF US HAS DIFFERENT TALENTS

What are some of the lessons about life that surface in a study of this parable of Jesus. Note, first of all, that each of us has different gifts. Jesus does not even begin to pretend in this Parable of the Talents that all of us are alike.

Max DePree is Chairman and CEO of Herman Miller, Inc., the furniture maker which was named one of Fortune's TEN BEST managed and most innovative companies. DePree, in his book, Leadership Is An Art, writes about his 96 year old father who was the founder of the Company.

Many years ago, when his father was still a young manager at the factory, a millwright died. The millwright was a "key" person who oversaw the operation of the factory. The entire activity of the operation depended upon him. DePree's father was unsure of what to do when the millwright died, but decided he should spend some time with the family. There were a few moments of awkward conversation as his father tried to find the right words to say.

The widow asked if it would be all right if she read aloud some poetry. And naturally his father agreed. When the widow returned, she began reading selective pieces of beautiful poetry. When she finished Max's father commented on how beautiful the poetry was and asked who wrote it. The widow replied that her husband, the millwright was the poet who had penned these lines.

DePree writes,

"It is...sixty years since that millwright died, and my father and many of us at Herman Miller continue to wonder, 'Was he a poet who did a millwright's work, or was he a millwright who wrote poetry!'"

We all have differening gifts. Some of us are poets. Others have the touch of mechanical genius. I know of some who are talented in more than one area of life. Some can sing. Some can build beautiful furniture. Some can do both. Some of us are still searching for onr own gift. Where do you fit in?

Harry Von Zell tells about comedian George Burns' love for singing. As Von Zell puts it,

"I know that George is a great music lover, because a poet once said that 'every man kills the thing he loves'...and George....well, I've heard what George does to a song".

But Burns is himself very modest about his singing ability. For example, he jokes about once going to a party...

"At 12:30 I said that I was going to sing a few songs, and all the guests formed a circle around the piano. And by the time I broke through I was too tired to sing."

Some of us are still searching for our gift, but all of us have different gifts.

WE ALL HAVE WHAT WE NEED TO SUCCEED

A second thing that lift up here is this that we all have what we need to

succeed in life.

Now the servant with one talent didn't have as much as the servant with five talents, but he had all that he needed. If he had not buried his talent in the ground, he would have been better off. Indeed, he could have done tremendous and great things with it. So here is a profound spiritual principle to take and turn over in your minds. God has given us all that we need. The sad thing is that we do not always appreciate the gifts we have.

I read somewhere not too long ago that there is a psychologist up at Harvard by the name of Howard Gardner who is trying to revolutionize the entire study of intelligence. According to his thinking, we have been studying IQ "all wrong". On our intelligence tests we only measure one or two forms of intelligence, but Gardner says that there are actually seven forms of intelligence. Seven. A good number - Biblical. So he must be right. He says that some people are gifted with linguistic intelligence. Our writers and our poets. Others have what he calls logical / mathematical intelligence. They make good accountants and good scientists.

Some people, he claims, are gifted spatially. Our artists and our architects. Some are gifted kinesthetically. Their bodies are unusually graceful and coordinated. These are our athletes and our dancers. Others are gifted interpersonally. They seem to know almost instinctively how to get along well with the people around them. These are our sales persons, our counsellors, our teachers. Some are gifted in their ability to look within. These are our philosophers and our "wise" people. Some are gifted musically.

But here is the important point. Gardner claims that everyone he has ever tested has scored high on at least one of these seven forms of intelligence. All of us are gifted in our own way. Many of us are smarter than we think we are. You may be wishing that someone had told you this a long time ago, but it's not too late. Be sure to tell your children. Some of them may go through life thinking that they are dumb because their form of intelligence is not valued in school.

All of us are gifted in some way. And all of us have what we need to succeed.

I would like to think that God has created us differently so that different tasks will get done in the world and that all of us have a place where we fit in.

WHAT COUNTS IS WHAT WE DO WITH OUR GIFT

The final thought to bring out is this. What counts is what we do with our gift, our talent. And this is the obvious point of this delightful parable. The servant with one talent had the same opportunity as the one with five talents, but he chose to bury his talent in the ground. And that's just about the worst thing we can do with any gift that God has given us.

Tony Campolo in his book, Wake Up America, tells of meeting a woman who is confined to a wheel chair. Although Nancy had a handicapping condition, she developed a unique ministry to people who are lonely and who are hurting. Nancy ran ads in the personals section of the newspaper that read:

"If YOU are lonely or have a problem, call me. I am in a wheelchair and seldom get out. We can share our problems with each other. Just call. I'd love to talk."

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"I tried to commit suicide. I was living all alone and I had no friends. I hated my job. I was constantly depressed."

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"Jesus appeared to me and told me that I'd had a healthy body and a crippled soul, but from then on I would have a crippled body and a healthy soul.

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CLOSING

I'm here to tell you this morning, dear friend, that it's not too late. Someone present may need to hear that.

I urge you, whoever you are, to think about your own life and what your special gift is. What has God entrusted to you to share with the world? And are you sharing it? Or, are you simply burying it in the ground?

Are you investing in junk? Or, are you using it to His glory and to something greater than yourself. You have all you need to have a terrific life and to make a real contribution to God's Kingdom. What are you doing with what you have been given? Think about it. Don't bury. Use it or you will end up losing it.

PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and Your presence in these moments...here at the end of this service of prayer and praise. Wrestle with each of us in the hidden corners of our lives...and help us to take those gifts you have given to each of us and to put them to use in the world where we live...in something greater than ourselves.....so that the love and light of Christ may shine in us and through us and make a difference. In the name of Christ, in whom we see life's highest hope as well as its deepest meaning. In His spirit and name we now pray. Amen.

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PRAYER

Make us sensitive to Your nearness and Your presence in these moments...here at the end of this service of prayer and praise. Wrestle with each of us in the hidden corners of our lives...and help us to take those gifts you have given to each of us and to put them to use in the world where we live...in something greater than ourselves.....so that the love and light of Christ may shine in us and through us and make a difference. In the name of Christ, in whom we see life's highest hope as well as its deepest meaning. In His spirit and name we now pray. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, November 14, 1993

VISITORS / GREETING

- A. A word of welcome to the visitors who have joined us this morning in worship....we delighted you're here and we do hope that we'll have the opportunity to greet you in a more personal way following this service...either at the door, or downstairs in the Russell where.....
- B. The coffee hour is a "good place" to get started in this church...it's always a warm, relaxed and easy time...good refreshments, too. Some of you may be here because of an invitation extended by a member of our church. Glad you responded to it... "each one, bring one" Sunday....
- C. Be free in the sharing of your name. Fill out....or sign one of the Guest Books. Come, worship with us. Come, work with us...
- D. Roots are deep in the soil of this part of the city. Fourth building....at work here at this busy corner of God's Kingdom since 1837....MINISTER in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit....
- E. Members: wear your name tags and make a couple of new friends. Get the name of that person you've been smiling at for a few Sundays or calling "HI"....and welcome back former active member, Paula Rucker...now Paula Kiger...of Tallahassee. Welcome back Paula...

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Review the parish concerns listed in the bulletin. Busy time right now....Christmas Fair approaching. A good time to think about bringing in something special for the Yorkville Common Pantry...next Sunday Thanksgiving Sunday. Table in the back of the sanctuary for your gift of food - canned meats or fruit or vegetables.
- B. Remember to do your "FARE SHARE" for the Church Fair this coming Saturday. Here to bring us up to date...and to inspire us to great things is last year's co-chair, Mavis Vann....
- C. Our 1994 Financial Canvass "peaks" today as we celebrate our Dedication Sunday....some churches call it, loyalty Sunday...and John Moore, co-vicechair and our church Treasurer is going to bring us up to date. John. What's the good word?
- D. Don't forget to support Stacey Staaterman at the Christmas Card table downstairs with a purchase. Only four Sundays left...better get with it and get your cards ordered....

PARISH CONCERNS (continued)

- E. Under pastoral concerns, you would want to know that Eric de Freitas is still in St. Vincent's Hospital and his number is 790 -1209....he may be there for another week or two.... I'm sure he would love to hear from you.
- F. Also, you would want to know that former active member PAUL C. KILBORN passed away on Monday of this week or it may have been Sunday night....in Richmond, Virginia where he has been living since leaving NYC in the Summer of 1987. Paul was 64. And a heart attack of last June damaged severely the left ventricle of his heart. I was in Richmond on Thursday for the Funeral Service....and offered the tribute. Paul and Mary Kilborn were a part of our fellowship from 1984 to 1987.

OFFERING

As We move now to the morning offering.....and along with our offerings of our money, our gifts and tithes and pledges of financial support, let us also offer our hearts to God and to one another in peace and in love. Jesus often said,

"It is more blessed to give than it is to receive".

ALSO A PARISH CONCERN

- G. One other word to share. One of the most shocking things to happen since the Fall of the Roman Empire in 386 AD took place this week...Thursday evening...and it is with great joy that I share the engagement announcement of Barbara Landon and George Leopold with you. As George says, "Barbara's made a real catch"....they're both here today....on time, too....and we share in their joy and great happiness...there's hope for others!