

Text: Matthew 25:14-30 Matthew 25:23 Well done, Good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things enter into the joy of your master.

Justifying slavery, capitalism and the exploitation of the many by the few. Just a sample of the uses to which this parable has been put. However, (thank you God for the “however” in life) however, I can still hear Bishop Lillibridge at Council saying ‘Episcopalians endorse critical Bible study because it is better to strengthen our faith through knowledge and understanding than through ignorance and obedience.’ Placing this parable in context certainly sharpens its’ meaning. The gospels have one, over-riding theme: Love is the fulfillment of all of the holy scripture. People who favor exploitation of other humans must look elsewhere for their rationale.

Biblical scholars seem to agree that the parable of the talents has two main points: First Don’t play it safe as a Christian and secondly, engage in service that produces results. Let us spend a few minutes considering these teachings. Do you remember the story of the parishioner who told the priest that “I generally like your sermons, but today you came close to changing from preaching to meddling.” That is the way I feel about Christians playing it safe. I all too often play it safe, instead of playing it Christian.

What do we mean by playing it safe? One way is when we “go along to get along.” We all want to be liked and appreciated by our friends and by the groups we value. That behavior does not apply just to teenagers! If “everybody is doing it” becomes my excuse for also engaging in suspect behavior, then I am playing it safe. I may adjust my behavior to meet the approval of people whose opinions I value, rather than adjusting my behavior according to the requirements of God’s love.

One is also playing it safe if we keep quiet, when a voice is needed. I wonder how many times I have laughed at jokes about blondes, or gays or people of color, or Jews or Irish? I could have said, that story or joke is inappropriate. But, I didn’t. My voice was needed and I was quiet. That is playing it safe; not playing it Christian.

Most of us are sometimes hypocrites. We profess one thing and do another. We have all heard people complain that churches are full of hypocrites. My response is “that is where they need to be.” That, in part, is what church is for. To help us heal from our departures from the love of Jesus, which is what hypocrisy is. Playing it safe, is when our hypocrisy becomes a lifestyle. If our public persona varies widely from our private actions, we have chosen to live a life of hypocrisy. It reminds one of Jesus denouncing as hypocrites people who prayed loudly on the street corner, but exploited people in private. People who have chosen the hypocrisy life style are very well rewarded in our culture. We need to play it Christian, instead of playing it safe, and, with God’s help, cure ourselves of indulging in such a damaging lifestyle.

Finally, the parable of the talents teaches us to engage in service that produces results. Our Christian service does not buy us salvation, eternal life or a shorter period in purgatory. We receive the benefits of belief through grace. Grace is the unmerited love of God. Because we enjoy God’s grace we will exhibit Christian values and virtues which will be translated into action. We are not to simply bury our gift of grace to protect it; we are to use that grace in Christian service to others. Although that service might at times be risky, it is blessed, nonetheless.

The parable has spoken to us yet again. Telling us not to play Christianity safely and to make sure we do service that has positive results. The third thing that the parable teaches us is that when we apply critical thinking to the holy Bible, we must use our knowledge in such a fashion that the baby of faith will not be thrown out with the bathwater of culturally based Bible stories. Bishop Curry, the current head of the American Episcopal Church says it best: "If it is not about love, it's not about God. Amen.