

Did you ever try to explain something complex to someone who did not have the background to understand it? A child, maybe, or someone who doesn't know basic information in the field you're talking about. It's difficult. You can try to simplify your explanation, but you don't want to undervalue the point. And when the other person doesn't understand, it's frustrating.

Consider Jesus, trying to explain that he would die and then rise again from the dead, and THEN, as if that weren't hard enough to understand, that after being away for a period of time in heaven, he would come again bringing the kingdom of God to earth! Hard for us to comprehend, it seemed absolutely preposterous to the disciples, because he was standing there before them.

So Jesus told stories to get his point across. And even if they didn't understand, and they didn't, later when they saw evidence of his resurrection they would remember his stories and they would begin to have hope of one day seeing him again.

The second coming. Not a concept we talk about very much, probably because it's so hard to imagine a 'coming again,' and yet our hope as Christians lies in the promise that when God's plan for the world is completed, all people will live in peace and harmony, all of us will be as close as can be to God who made us, and, for us Christians, Christ will reign over all the earth.

In the reading from Revelation, John of Patmos is carried to a high mountain where he can see the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. It's a description of the second coming, the kingdom of God touching earth.

When will it happen? Will it look anything like what is described in Revelation? No one has any idea. The early Christians thought they would see Jesus' return in their lifetime. It didn't happen. And I think most of us would say we're not even close to, not even moving toward, the vision of a perfect world.

We live in the time between. Our lives are lived between Jesus' coming 2000+ years ago to live among us, and the expectation of his coming again.

In an effort to explain this "time between" to his disciples, Jesus tells a series of stories, one of which is this parable of the 10 talents.

A man goes away on a trip but before he goes he entrusts his abundant wealth to his servants – 5 talents to one, 2 talents to another, and one to the last.

A talent was a very large sum of money, the equivalent of 15 years' worth of wages for a day laborer. You can imagine that those hearing Jesus' story perked up their ears at the idea of being given 5 talents.

Anyway, it's actually about Jesus going away. He entrusts his wealth to his servants, or his followers, to us in fact, but we know that Jesus wasn't stinking rich, so we can translate the talents as money into talents as the abundant gifts God gives us.

We can use the word "talent" here in the way we use it today – gifts, abilities, those things we are able to do well and are interested in doing, our talents.

Jesus entrusts all of us with talents, but some have talents that are more obvious, some people seem to have more talents than others, some seem to be able to identify them and use them easier than others. Some realize their gifts come from God, others don't.

Some use their gifts gratefully, while some envy other people's gifts and underplay their own. Some are unable to develop their gifts because they believe God to be harsh and vindictive, a God who gives them only trouble and not gifts, like the slave who received the one talent.

So the questions this parable puts to us are these: "Do you know that your talents come from a loving God?" and "What will you do with the talents you are given in the "between time" while we wait for Jesus' return?"

I suppose it was this cosmic question that caused a friend of mine to give me this shirt some years ago. (show shirt) "Jesus is coming. Look busy." It's meant to be funny, of course. Pretend you're busy. But I suppose it expresses the problem, too, of just what we should be busy doing. Look busy because you have no idea what you should be doing? Pretty good shirt for a clergy person.

But look at this parable. There are no clear instructions here for what to do with the talents entrusted to each slave. There are no instructions at all until the end of the story when the master returns and makes his judgment about each of the slaves. And for us the master has not yet returned, so we cannot be absolutely certain of what is expected of us.

There are clues, though. Do not bury your treasure! Don't hide your talents but rather use them. Being faithful in this parable means taking initiative, taking risks, stepping out of the comfort zone in order to make something grow and to make a contribution to the world we live in.

How do we use our gifts, our time, our energy, our talents, our treasure – all of it? Can we use our talents to make something grow?

Even the smallest of gifts, the ones we hardly know we have, the ones we don't perceive as useful, even those gifts can be invested and made to grow, if we know that God gave them to us and if we therefore use them gratefully.

Jesus is coming. Look busy? How about Look hopeful, look grateful, look useful, look faithful. Jesus is coming.  
Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria

