

## ***“Ignite—Igniting Our Impact”***

We're coming to near the end of our capital campaign and this series of messages on vision, mission, stewardship, generosity and sacrifice. As with every campaign we've done in the past, some people are gung ho and ready to make it happen, they're positive and supportive, some people are indifferent and just want to get it over with, and some just don't like it and I get complaints--not many but a few. And that's OK, because around here we've always encouraged people to be open and honest and that there's nothing wrong with pushing back against ideas.

But we've got to be careful when we say, "Let's not talk about stewardship and money. It just drives people away. Why can we just study the Bible?" Because 25% of what Jesus taught about was how we handle our money and possessions. And most of us have this tendency to want to hear everything Jesus taught about, except this! He taught a lot about it because he knew that people would always struggle with stewardship, and that we'd always struggle with generosity.

When it comes to answering the question about why we have to talk about this from time to time, I almost always come back to a story I read a long time ago. The President of Miami Christian College, President Pierson, clarified this in one of his speeches. He was talking about how so many people say that the church is always asking for money. He said, "You are probably right. But let me tell you a personal story. We had a little boy--our firstborn. He was a delight to our hearts, but he was always costing us something. He needed clothing, shoes, food, and had special needs that we gladly provided, for he was our son. Then one day he died. It was an experience that I hope you will never have. Now, he does not cost us a dollar. [You see] every need is an unfailing sign of life and growth. Body, mind, and soul have their needs and they must be met continually. A ministry that is constantly in need of funds is alive and growing and going somewhere. A dead ministry has no need, and will not bother you."

Saint Paul's is very much alive because we're on a clear mission to lead people to an active faith in Jesus Christ, and we have needs and so I'm going to bother you. It's my job. So hang with me today. Because I want us to look at a passage of scripture that calls us to take risks in order to make an impact.

Risk. Following Jesus is meant to be risky business. Let's take a look at one of parables that he told. This comes from the Gospel of Matthew. ***“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.***

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents...And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matthew 25:14-30).

Now, this is called the parable of the talents and when we think of talents we think about an ability or skill that we might have. Some people can sing, some can write, some can fix things, some can organize people and events, some are great decision makers, some can cook, some can garden. We think about those things as talents and the English word "talent" is taken directly from this parable. But in Jesus' day, a talent was not an ability, it was

a specific measurement of money—a lot of money. It was the equivalent of 6,000 days' wages for a laborer. I worked this out. **At \$9 an hour a talent is \$432,000.**

So the master comes to his servants and entrusts one with about \$400,000, to the second servant, about \$800,000 and to the third servant over \$2 million. Can you imagine that? Your boss coming to you and saying, "I'm leaving town, this is part of my personal fortune, here's \$2 million dollars, put this to work for me, and I'll check back in with you when I get back in town." I've got to think that those servants must have been a little overwhelmed. Maybe they were excited, maybe they were honored to have been trusted with so much, maybe more than anything they were a little afraid.

Now, when we hear this story we're supposed to ask, "What was Jesus trying to teach us here about life and about God?" And part of what he's saying here is that **All of us have been entrusted with a treasure from God.** What is that treasure? In the parable it's money but that's a metaphor for something more. What is that treasure? The treasure that God has given to you and me is everything. It's your very life. You've been given so many hours in your life and that's part of the treasure. If you live to be 80 you will have had 700,000 hours in your life, all of them a gift.

Your health is part of that treasure from God, the abilities you have, the money you make, the world that you live in, what you see and can do, it's all a gift, pure gift, entrusted to your care. All that is the treasure that God has given you.

Part of what the parable of the talents teaches us is to have a perspective on life where we see that **Everything in life is a gift that's on loan to us from God.** We didn't bring anything with us into this world and we can't take anything with us when we leave, but it's all entrusted to our care by God. So instead of looking at everything that makes up our lives and saying, "This is all mine!" We look at our lives and say, "God, this is all yours, what do you want me to do with it?"

This parable also teaches us to have perspective about ourselves. In this story we are the servants. The Greek word here is the word "**dulos**", which literally means slave. I don't know about you, but I don't really like that word. But the truth of life, the truth conveyed in scripture, is that something is going to be your master. Your master can be sin and death. Or your master can be the God who created you and loves you. To have God be your master means that you recognize that God has paid a price for you, redeemed you, God has set you free from all the other things that have enslaved you. And the scriptures say that you were bought with a price. The price was that Jesus Christ shed his blood in order to save you. God paid a tremendous price to draw you into relationship with him and set you free from slavery to sin and death. And when God is your master, you recognize, "I do belong to God, my life belongs to God, so what I want to do in my life is my master's will."

It's us saying every day, "God, I belong to you and whatever you want from me, that's what I want to do. To honor you and serve you." Everyday becomes a mission where God has sent you out. And every person you meet, and every encounter you have, every business transaction you make, it's all a mission from God. And the interesting thing is when you begin to look at your life this way, you find that life is much more exciting. There's much more joy when you understand that you're living for God and not just living for yourself.

Then in this parable there comes to a day of reckoning when the master returns. It's telling us that **One day we will stand face-to-face with Jesus and he will ask us, "What did you do with what I gave you?"** It's also telling us how to measure success in our lives. So how do you measure success in life? Is it the one who dies with the most toys wins? Or do you measure success by how happy you are? In the story success is measure by a willingness to take the right risks.

Well, the master comes back after being gone a long time and he wants to know what his servants did with all that he had entrusted to them. What he finds is that two servants had done real, real well. And one servant who had not done so well. The first servant had the five talents and he comes in and says, "Master I'm so excited to share with you what I've done. I've taken what you gave me and I've doubled it. You gave me 5 talents, here's 10 talents." The second one does the same: "Master you gave me 2 talents and here is 4."

To be like these first two servants would mean that when you come to end of your life, you have used it well. Whatever God gave you as a gift--the love of God in Christ, every hour of your life, guidance and hope, friends and family, mercy, education, finances and whatever talents you had--you used those in a way that put your gifts into action to further God's work and God's kingdom.

And that means at your judgment day God would say to you, "I remember all those times where you were interrupted by someone else's need and you stopped and you helped. And you were more concerned about others than yourself, I saw every single time you did that. And what you don't know is the rest of the story. About how your

care for that person went on to touch this person, and then that person, and then that person... I saw when you were uncomfortable and you did those things you were afraid to do, you took a risk and stepped out. I saw how it made a difference in the world. And I saw how you invested in children and how you taught them about me. I saw how you went on mission trips to places that were scary to you. I saw all of those ways you used your business in order to bless other people and encourage them. Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master." That's what God wants to say to you on the last day when you stand there face to face with him.

But then we see the servant who failed to do that. This man took his talent and buried it in the ground. He was a safety junkie. He was afraid and buried his \$400k in the ground and when the master came back after being gone a long time, this servant digs up his talent, brings it to the master and says, "Here's what you gave to me. I didn't do anything with it. It's just like you gave it to me." And the master is furious. What's implied here is that the servant knew exactly what was expected of him. He knew that his master expected him to take some risks. But the one thing that was not allowable was to do nothing. The master was telling the servants, "I expect you to take risks with this, but whatever you do, don't do nothing."

Listen, when it comes to the Christian life, being a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are called to take risks. I look at this parable and wonder if that one talent man had taken some risks with what the master had given him and lost the money, I'm guessing that the master would have said, "At least you tried. Well done."

The Christian life is a life that requires risk. It's a risk in talking to someone else about your faith. Your heart beats really fast, and your palms sweat, and your mouth gets dry. It takes risk to talk about the difference Christ has made in your life. It requires a willingness to risk to go on a mission trip like we've done to Kentucky, or Wichita, Colorado, or Nebraska, or New Orleans, or Nicaragua.

You take a risk by helping at Watered Gardens, or Crosslines, or the Community Clinic, or Turnaround Ranch. You think, "I'm going to be around people very different from me in situations that I'm not used to or comfortable with." You volunteer for Hearts and Hammers for work that you don't do every day. There are risks.

You take a risk if you sign up to teach children's Sunday School. Or help with the youth at the Crossing. "What if the kids don't like me? What if I'm boring?" Or "What if I sing in the choir and I miss a note?"

For us as a church right now, we're all being asked to take a financial risk. What can we give financially over the next two years to eliminate our churches debt, provide for a few small renovations, and get us ready to do more for our community. It's a risk to make a commitment over and above your normal giving for 2 years so we can have more to do more, for more people. Next Sunday is commitment Sunday, please be willing to look at what you have and ask God, "What do you want to do through me in this campaign?" And be ready to invest some of your treasure for something bigger than you.

Some of us spend our whole lives playing it safe. We take the gifts that God has given to us, all that investment he's put into us, and we waste it, or we stuff it into a shoebox and figure, "I'll just give it all back to God later." But God says, "That's not what I was looking for. I was looking for people who are willing to do something with what I gave them."

When we do something with what we've been given the impact is huge. Kylea Whelton is 17 and wrote me this a couple weeks ago. *"Basically this is exactly what St. Paul's/The Salvage Yard has done for me. Last March I found myself struggling because I had gotten a pretty bad speeding ticket, I moved out of my house and was living away from home and being only 17 years old was on the wrong path. Finally I acknowledged that I made a mistake and went home to my mom. Things at home were very uncomfortable and I spent most the time in my room to avoid fighting with my family. In August/September we started coming to St. Paul's and your sermons were unlike the services my parents forced me to attend in the past and began coming on my own free will. At this point I began volunteering at the salvage yard and the second night there was the first night I'd ever truly felt God in my heart. I don't know what it is that you do there, but I find myself smiling all the time because I trust in God with all that I have now. I make better decisions, I'm more rational and have made it my mission to bring my best friend to church (she currently is discovering God). I keep referring to the ripple effect series to kind of help myself, help her. All the things I'm learning in church, I'm applying throughout the week and I can't help but be thankful of St. Paul's :) If it weren't for you, Ben and Tammy I'd still be a silly teenager fighting with my mom over spilt milk, now we live in peace."* Kylea Whelton

A man wrote this anonymously, *"Prior to coming to St. Paul's I never worshipped at a church except for major holidays. I believed in God but never strongly. 9 years ago we found St. Paul's and now I certainly consider myself a Christian. I now work with the youth and have been in a small group for 3 or 4 years now. St. Paul's has*

*provided my wife and I a place and environment to raise our kids as Christians. Instead of just raising a family, we are raising a Christian family."*

Some of you may know Terry Alartosky. Her story is just amazing. For a big part of her adult life she was a drug addict and alcoholic. For a while she was a stripper. She hit rock bottom and connected to the Salvage Yard a number of years ago and her life changed radically. She went back to college and got a bachelors degree in psychology and is now working on her master's degree. She wants to help rescue people that faced things like she did. Her faith in Jesus that came alive through Saint Paul's at the Salvage Yard, is what is driving her forward, giving her life meaning, leading her in her purpose.

A young woman wrote this to me. If it weren't for my Saint Paul's family, I may have actually attempted or even committed suicide due to a deep depression. I was already a Christian when I joined St. Paul's, but my faith became more tangible to me as I helped lead and teach youth. My faith is always growing and changing. And if it weren't for St. Paul's, my marriage would have ended in divorce." I look out and see her every Sunday and know the impact we've had on her and so many others that struggle with depression.

You taking a step of faith, a financial risk, by postponing something you want, or giving something up, or changing your priorities to give to this need financially, has a powerful effect. When we retire our debt, we will be able to do more as we develop programs for older adults, young adults and singles, mission programs to help people out of poverty, things that we're not yet doing, ministries for kids and youth. But each of is going to have to take some risks.

Today we have about 550 member households. I'd like to share the two-year commitments that some of our leaders have made to *Ignite*. Out of our 550 member households we've received 42 advanced commitments. That's 7 percent of our member households. This group of our leaders has committed \$404,392 over two years to the *Ignite* campaign for realizing God's plans. Praise God! We are well on our way of meeting our need of \$1.6 million. Please understand that your leaders have demonstrated their commitment to Christ and their sacrifice already. There is \$1,195,608 left to go...and now it's up to you. And what it will take for you is a process and a spiritual journey.

This week you'll be getting a commitment card in the mail. Please pray carefully over that and consider what you might do. Next Sunday, bring that commitment card with you and celebrate the next part of our journey together as a church.

This is not about pressure, it's about prayer. If you don't have anything to give, God doesn't expect you to give. But what risk you might take for a mission bigger than all of us. Our risk for the Kingdom will always mean asking, "Lord, what would you have me do?" and praying, "No my will, but yours, be done." We listen and respond.

That's my prayer for myself, it is my prayer for you. Will you take the risk? And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*I thank Rev. Adam Hamilton, Senior Pastor at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection for his resources for this message, along with Maxie Dunnam for his book Twelve Parables of Jesus, and Ellsworth Kalas for his book Parables from the Back Side.*