

Twenty-Sixth Sunday After Pentecost (A/RCL)  
Matthew 25.14-30  
November 13, 2005  
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

Kristin Morton, Holy Trinity's Young Adult in Global Mission serving in Weald, England, regularly sends out an e-mail newsletter updating us on her ministry. The November edition of the newsletter includes this reflection on 1 Peter 4:10: "Each one should use whatever gifts he has been given to serve others."

One of the things I have really struggled with is all the paperwork I have been doing. I really started feeling like, "Am I a secretary or a youth worker?" I have since decided that I am a bit of both. The above verse says we should use whatever gifts we have to serve others; well, apparently one of my gifts is the ability to do paperwork. I have learned in the past month that I am pretty efficient and organized when it comes to paperwork and even though at times I don't really like it, it is a "gift" I have and it is a way I can serve. I learned that rather than fighting with the gifts I have been given I should just get on with it and use them. Seems like a silly concept but I think we often do this. We **want** gifts that we **don't** have or **don't** want the gifts we **do** have, but in the end the gifts we have are brilliant because they are given to us from God and we should use them to serve God.

By sharing that Spirit-driven insight, Kristin unknowingly gave me a great lead-in to this weekend's homily about the parable of the talents. The English word *talent* actually comes from this story Jesus told. *Talent* originally referred to the largest unit of money in the ancient world. One talent was as much money as a day laborer would make in twenty years of labor. It's at the other end of the spectrum from the "mite," the quarter penny that the widow put in the temple treasury elsewhere in the Gospels. A "talent" was as big as a "mite" was small.... Scripture scholars have said that Jesus used that huge amount of money in His story to remind us of how **precious** the gifts are that God gives us.

Kristin definitely has gifts other than that of paperwork ☺. Further on in her newsletter she talks about leading worship for the little guys at the church she serves, helping the older kids prepare and lead their own worship service, convening a high school youth group, teaching at the local school.... She has wisdom to see that God has given her a wide diversity of gifts, some of which don't look too exciting or showcase her creativity, but all of which are important to the work, the ministry, at hand.

Kristin and others remind us that even humble gifts bestow great dignity on the bearer. Even humble gifts bestow great dignity on the bearer because the Holy One is the Source of **all** gifts, and because humble gifts lovingly given have great power to do good in this world. **Your** and **my** humble gifts have great power to do good in this world. Listen to this example from the life of Henri Nouwen.

Nouwen was a Belgian priest known worldwide as the author of numerous best-selling books on the spiritual life, a professor of theology at Notre Dame and Harvard, a perennially in-demand lecturer at international conferences. In *Soul Survivor* by Philip Yancey we read how Nouwen's hectic schedule and the demands placed upon him by many people drove him to the brink of a nervous breakdown. He sought rest, refreshment, within the L'Arche community, a group of people whose ministry is caring for the seriously disabled, people mentally and physically unable to care for themselves.

Nouwen ultimately decided to leave his university teaching position in order to become the priest-in-residence at the L'Arche community named Daybreak in Toronto, Canada. Here is what Yancey writes:

Daybreak assigned Nouwen one person to look after in particular: Adam. (Their relationship is celebrated in Nouwen's book, *Adam: God's Beloved*, published posthumously in 1997.) Adam was the weakest and most disabled person in the community. Although he

was in his twenties, Adam could not speak, dress or undress himself, could not walk alone or eat without help. Instead of counseling Ivy League students and juggling a busy schedule, Nouwen had to learn a new set of skills: how to feed, change and bathe Adam, how to support his glass as he drank, how to push his wheelchair over a road full of potholes. He ministered not to leaders and intellectuals but to a young man who was considered by many a vegetable, a useless person who should not have been born. Yet Nouwen gradually learned that he, not Adam, was the chief beneficiary in this strange, misfitted relationship. (p. 309)

Yancey actually visited Nouwen at Daybreak. He confesses in his book:

I must admit I had a fleeting doubt as to whether this was the best use of the busy priest's time. I had heard Henri Nouwen speak, and read many of his books, and recognized all that he had to offer. Could not someone else take over the manual chores of caring for Adam? Back in his office, when I cautiously broached the subject with Nouwen himself, he informed me that I had completely misinterpreted him. "I am not giving up anything," he insisted. "It is I, not Adam, who gets the main benefit from our friendship." (pp. 314-15)

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And think about the parable. The ones who receive the talents in the story are not "gifted" for their own sakes. They are entrusted with somebody else's wealth; they are **stewards**, not **owners** of the talents, the gifts, in their possession. The guy who buried the gift instead of investing it, who didn't **risk** doing **anything** with it, who didn't **explore** its possibilities, who crazily **hid** it so he didn't **lose** it, ends up as toast. Instead

of “good and trustworthy,” he’s called “wicked and lazy” and “worthless,” not exactly rave reviews from the boss....

This parable teaches us not to disdain our humblest gifts and not to gloat over our most dazzling ones. We’re stewards, not owners of the talents in our possession. In God’s eyes, filling out the dullest paperwork, changing the diaper of someone who is very young, very old, very disabled, is as important as delivering the most thunderous sermon, writing the most beautiful symphony, painting a masterpiece or inventing a cure for cancer. Whatever your gifts are, they are precious to the Gift-giver and to His people. Believe it. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Olson