

## **Intro: Distributing Vegetables at Christ the King Episcopal Church**

This fall, via my better 2/3 Cathy, via an organization called Indivisible, I learned of a food distribution program at Christ the King Episcopal Church in Woodlawn. Feeling the need to help during these troubled times, and perhaps even hearing a call, I crawled out from under the shell and routines of my comfortable retired life and, on a chilly Wednesday morning, found myself in the sanctuary with about half a dozen others, putting carrots, potatoes, apples, and so forth into grocery bags. Ever since, I've been "a regular" on the "produce bag preparation team", showing up twice a month to help out. It feels good, and I enjoy the folks.

Feel free to talk to me about this opportunity. Also, I have connected Channing's Reverend Jane Smith with Christ the King's Reverend Mary Eliot, in hopes that our churches can work together in some way in the future.

Back to my story. Some of the food is bought using donated money, (we give monthly), and a significant amount of food is also donated by the Maryland Food Bank. A volunteer rents a large van to pick up food from the food bank and bring it back to the church, where the team unloads the food, usually in 40-50 pound bags or boxes, and wheels it down the hallway to the sanctuary for further distribution. After the food is distributed into bags, it is wheeled back through the hallway to both the truck for distribution elsewhere and to a main entrance for distribution locally. Needless to say, (though I will say it), I have been up and down this hallway quite a number of times.

And in this hallway there is a large bulletin board display with various pictures of the church's youth engaged in various activities – I haven't looked too closely at what, as I am concentrating on moving food – but along with the pictures, in large prominent letters cut from colorful construction paper, is the question "How are you using your talents?"

How are you using your talents?

### **The parable of the talents**

Now in a UU church, such a display and question might simply be a highlighting and celebration of their youth, but in a church named Christ the King, it is also obviously a marked reference to Christ's so-called Parable of the Talents, which I just shared with you in today's reading from the Book of Matthew.

Like any of Jesus' parables, the Parable of the Talents is fodder for much thoughtful study and many, many sermons. During my research, I was pleased to learn that one talent was

actually a \*lot\* of money, something I hadn't considered before. Even though the third servant receives the least amount of money, it is still a lot of money.

So, what does the parable *mean*? Well, in spite of what some folks think, it *is not* Jesus's endorsement of free trade and capitalism; it *is not* a justification for greed – it *is not* meant to be taken literally. IT IS A PARABLE! Heck, in the very first verse it says it is a simile:

14 For the kingdom of heaven *is as* one traveling into a far country, who called their servants...

So if it's not about money, what *is* it about? There are many subtleties, angles, and shades of meaning that could be discussed, but broadly speaking, (and many Christians agree with this), it is about stewardship. About taking care of, growing, and passing on the *many* gifts that we have been given. What kinds of gifts?

Well, material wealth was used in the parable, and even though I just went to some lengths to emphasize that it was not about money, it is nonetheless a lesson about money in that if you don't do anything with it, then, uh, you don't do anything with it, *even though in our society you very much can, because money is a proxy for material and intellectual gifts*. For example, with money you can feed people, you can clothe people, you can house people, you can educate people.

Then there are what we often call the “natural gifts” that some folks are born with. Gifts that we nowadays usually associate with the word talent. A gift for music, for arts, for languages, for science, etc., etc., etc. These gifts are rare and awe-inspiring.

And then there are what I would call universal spiritual gifts. Gifts that pretty much everyone gets, because they are human. Some examples are Joy, Love, and Life writ large. I'm sure we could come up with a long list. These are the gifts that I want to focus on this morning. To make my point, I will retell the Parable of the Talents using Joy as the “currency”. It's a little rough around the edges, and it doesn't match up perfectly, but I hope it will land its punches.

14 For the Joy of Life is as one traveling into a far country, who called their own servants and delivered unto them their joys.

15 And unto one they gave five joys, to another two, and to another one; to every according to their several abilities; and straightaway took to the journey.

16 Then the one that had received the five joys went and shared them, and made them other five joys.

17 And likewise the one that had received two, also gained another two.

18 But the one that received one joy went and dug in the earth, and hid the traveler's joy.

19 After a long time, the traveler cometh, and reckoneth with their servants.

20 And so the one that had received five joys came and brought the other five joys, saying, Lord, thou gave unto me five joys: behold, I have gained beside them five joys more.

21 Their Lord said unto them, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast learned that joy begets joy, you will create even more joy as you live forward; enter thou into the Joy of Life.

22 Then the servant who had received two joys came and said, Lord, thou gave unto me two joys: behold, I have gained two other joys beside them.

23 Their Lord said unto them, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast learned that joy begets joy, you will create even more joy as you live forward; enter thou into the Joy of Life.

24 Then the servant who had received the one joy came and said, Lord, I knew that Life is hard, that joy is fleeting, and that misery befalls us all;

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy joy in the earth: lo, there thou hast what is thine.

26 Their lord answered and said unto them, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that joy is fleeting and that misery befalls all;

27 Thou oughtest therefore to have shared the joy to create more.

28 But instead you led a life of no joy for all this time.

29 For unto every one that learns that joy begets joy shall be given joy, and shall have joy in abundance; but those who learn this not shall not have any joy.

30 And so you have doomed yourself to a joyless life; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Here's some spiritual homework for you: consider, or even rewrite the parable of the talents using Love or Compassion as the "currency".

### **Wrapup**

So, what are we supposed to do? I like to boil it down to the following: 1) God is generous with her gifts, and 2) we have a moral obligation to develop those gifts, to use them, to share them. Don't bury your Wealth in the ground! Use it to a good end! Don't bury your Joy in the ground! Live it out for all to see, for Joy is infectious! Don't bury your Love in the ground! Share it with the world and make it grow!

To steal a bit from fan favorite Mary Oliver, on that day of reckoning, when you reach the end of your time, and you look back at what you have done with your one, precious, and wild life, how will you have used your talents?

Will you leave this life filled with regret for the good you could have done, but did not do?  
Will you leave with a wailing and a gnashing of teeth?

Or will you leave knowing that you were a good steward, and that your sharing made a positive difference, still in love with the life you were given?

My great hope for myself, for you, and for everyone is that it will be the latter; for that is how we build the Kingdom of Heaven on this earth.

Amen.