

Eternal Investment

When I worked at the library there was a popular self-help book called, "Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway". Now, most of us don't want to feel the fear at all. We'd prefer a comfortable existence, one without fear. But fear is part of life, it is a natural healthy reaction that can help keep us safe. Take fire for instance; a healthy fear of fire prevents us from being burned. However, being too fearful is not helpful, it can paralyse us and prevent us from taking any kind of risk. An unhealthy fear of fire prevents us from ever enjoying bread toasted in the old-fashioned way.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus tells a parable - that is a story to illustrate an important point. It is story of risk and reward and the responsibility that comes with great gift - it is known as the parable of the talents. A talent was a unit of measurement for money in the ancient world. The modern value of a talent can slightly differ dependent upon how it is calculated, but one thing is clear, it was a lot of money. An amount of money that would take decades to earn, an amount of money an ordinary person would never hold in their hand.

So, before he goes on a journey to a faraway land, a man takes what is precious and valuable to him and entrusts three slaves with various amounts of talents. To the first slave the master gave five talents, to the second slave he gave two talents, and to the third slave he gave one talent. The first two slaves don't waste any time and immediately go to work investing the money diligently and wisely. When the master returns, they show him the results, each of them has doubled the amount of talents he was given. The master is very pleased and their efforts are generously rewarded because they were responsive to their master's expectations.

The third slave does something different with the one talent he is given by the master, he buries it in the ground to keep it safe. When the master returns, he gives it back thinking that he has faithfully done what the master wanted, but the master condemns him for being a wicked and lazy servant.

I want you to notice the reason this slave gave for burying his talent. The servant said "I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." (Matt 25:25 NRSV). Rather than facing his fears and taking a risk, he risked nothing. He took what was entrusted to him and hid it, he buried the talent. Okay it was safe but there was no potential for gain.

God has entrusted to us, all of us, something that is valuable and precious, the Gospel message, and at the heart of the message is love. God created our world out of love and for love. God has invested an immense amount of love in us through Jesus' life and ministry, his death and resurrection.

What is God looking for in return for his investment? Well when we meet Jesus face to face it would be a mistake to have the attitude of the third slave "Here have what is yours. Here's your gospel, the message of your love, I have kept it safe I haven't

used it to transform my life or the lives of others. I did not want to take a risk, so here it is, perfectly safe and undamaged.”

As God’s children we are not entrusted with the gospel message to keep it safe and then return it unused. The return God expects is not anything we cannot give or do, but it does involve risk - the return God expects from us is to invest his great treasure, the gospel, the good news of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

What does an investment in the gospel look like? It means being transformed ourselves and living out our faith, not just on Sundays, but every day of the week. Showing the world the difference that following Jesus makes in the way we live our lives and telling people about the ways God has transformed us. It means using the gospel message of love to transform the world, choosing to love and to tell of God’s love. Telling of God’s love, telling our story, saying “I love you”, seeking or giving forgiveness is a risky business. Choosing love and living out the Gospel can seem scary. But we need to feel the fear and do it anyway.

So, don’t let fear take over. Don’t worry about the return our investment of God’s love will bring, that’s God’s business. Do the loving and the telling and through his grace God will do the rest. Take some risks for love!

And if you haven’t tried bread toasted over an open fire, give it a go. But make sure you use a long-handled fork!