"Here I am, Lord…"

by Rev. Sara Macavei-Katocz

Grace Presbyterian Church

Matthew 25:14-30 – Today's English Version

""At that time the Kingdom of heaven will be like this.

Once there was a man who was about to leave home on a trip; he called his servants and put them in charge of his property. He gave to each one according to his ability: to one he gave five thousand gold coins, to another he gave two thousand, and to another he gave one thousand. Then he left on his trip.

The servant who had received five thousand coins went at once and invested his money and earned another five thousand. In the same way the servant who had received two thousand coins earned another two thousand. But the servant who had received one thousand coins went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

"After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The servant who had received five thousand coins came in and handed over the other five thousand. 'You gave me five thousand coins, sir,' he said. 'Look! Here are another five thousand that I have earned.' 'Well done, you good and faithful servant!' said his master. 'You have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness!'

Then the servant who had been given two thousand coins came in and said, 'You gave me two thousand coins, sir. Look! Here are another two thousand that I have earned.' 'Well done, you good and faithful servant!' said his master. 'You have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness!'

Then the servant who had received one thousand coins came in and said, 'Sir, I know you are a hard man; you reap harvests where you did not plant, and you gather crops where you did not scatter seed. I was afraid, so I went off and hid your money in the ground. Look! Here is what belongs to you.' 'You bad and lazy servant!' his master said. 'You knew, did you, that I reap harvests where I did not plant, and gather crops where I did not scatter seed? Well, then, you should have deposited my money in the bank, and I would have received it all back with interest when I returned.

Now, take the money away from him and give it to the one who has ten thousand coins. For to every person who has something, even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him. As for this useless servant---throw him outside in the darkness; there he will cry and gnash his teeth.'

I. We are blessed

In this remarkable parable of Jesus we meet **God as Supreme Giver.**

The parable begins with the Master distributing gifts to his servants.

The Master is distributing gifts knowing the servants, measuring their ability, but in the meantime taking risk with each of them. He is generous with each of them.

It is obvious that Jesus is talking about us and our Heavenly Father. So we are the one to whom the wealth of the Master is given.

The point in His giving can be summarized as such: **We are Blessed**.

We are blessed and this means:

1. Each of us has been entrusted with ***valuable gifts***.
2. What we have been given it is not hours, but we are ***accountable to the Giver*** of the gifts.
3. The ***gifts are given with a purpose***. Something has to be DONE with them; they will need to be activated.
4. The parable make clear also that each servant receives *a* ***limited amount*** of the man's wealth – five, two and one talents, or as the modern translation says: five, two and one thousand of coins.

So, we are told by Jesus to **Invest in the Best.**

II. Invest in the BEST

I would like to use the word "BEST" as an anagram and than with each letter beginning a word that will help us to remember the importance of stewardship:

1. **B: Build** – Building something it means to do it
    a. *intentionally* and
    b. with a *clear purpose* in mind;
    c. to *plan in advance*
    d. and *over a period of time*.
2. **E: Evaluate** what you choose – not just once, but again and again. Align your spending of time and money and effort to your heart and to the calling God is placing on your heart. But remember "heart" is not just emotion; it is what we choose to represent our love. It is also important that we remember the second part of the great commandement: "Love your neighbour as yourself."
3. **S: Simplify** your life.

You can't do everything, so make the decision now not to try to.

Build your schedule around a minimum of things you alone"should do" and a maximum of things you'd love to share with others and do, and pair up with them to do it.

We grow into our earning...

4. **T: Test your trust**

Yes, indeed it is not easy to trust God when you look to your budget. God is asking us to bring to him the first 10 percent, and not the remaining ten percent. Are we open to be challenged there?

III. Awareness that leads to action

Perhaps the most important is to become AWARE that whatever we have we have it because the Master entrusted to us. And we ought to make good use of it.

Fasting and worshiping God without the act of kindness and service is not something the Lord likes.

The Bible reading from Isaiah chapter 58 points us very clearly out that the worship that the Lord's likes is the worship manifested in the act of kindness and service:

We forget that to be true to God means that we live with and are in solidarity with those whom God reached out to help: those suffering injustice at the hands of the authorities; those denied their fair share of the land's produce; those denied proper housing and clothing; those stripped of their dignity by the powers of the

world; those who have been discarded or forgotten by society.

Perhaps God is calling us to narrow the gap between our worship rites and our conduct to our neighbours. In our passage of scripture God is speaking to a world where ***there is enough for all***, in the midst of a world that is starving — our world, yours and mine. A world where over three billion people, half of God's children, live on less than two dollars per day, and one billion live on less than one dollar per day; a world where the ***life expectancy gap*** between the rich places of the world, like Canada, and the poor places of the world, like Malawi, is now forty years.

Listen to what God says to anyone inclined to hear: "Is not this the fast that I choose to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them … Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say, 'Here I am.'"(Isaiah

Commentator and preacher Fred Craddock says that the great mystery of our faith is the reversal of the old dream that said "wherever the Christ is there, there is no pain and suffering" to the revelation that "wherever there is pain and suffering, there is the Christ."

This Sunday , the PWS&D Sunday is a time of the year when we can discover the **long term impact** in what we give to others.

A. awareness of what is going on around us,
B. what is going on in our world
C. and awareness about our giving power.

Let's see people's who became aware and who acted on that awareness with whatever resources they had:

A. A Chicken and a Picnic Table

http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca/testimonial/718/a_chicken_and_a_picnic_table.aspx

A chicken changed Lorne Underwood's life. Five years after he held that chicken, it still brings tears to his eyes.

"We'd travelled to Malawi and Mozambique on a Food Study Tour visiting some of the projects supported by the Foodgrains Bank," he told me recently. "One of the villages we visited had received food aid and when they greeted us they thanked us profusely. We were given gifts such as hats and mats. On our way to the place where they had prepared lunch for us, a Grandmother - who was the caregiver to her grandchildren because their parents had died of AIDS - stepped onto the path in front of us. She reached out and pressed a live chicken into my hands. She wanted me to have it."

Lorne paused to clear his throat as the tears began to flow. "I said thank you. And she said, in her limited English, 'no, thank YOU!' She was so grateful for the help she'd received that she gave the only thing she had to give – the chicken that was probably meant to feed her grandchildren that night. That was the moment I knew just how important the work we are doing is."

Lorne told me this story while sitting on the end of a long picnic table that stretched so far I could barely see the end. The picnic table is Lorne's most recent effort to make a difference for people likee the grandmother he met in Africa.

Lorne hails from Clifford, Ontario and has been part of the local growing project for more years than he can remember. He laughed when I asked how long he's been involved. "Somewhere between 15 and 18 years ago I first heard about the Foodgrains Bank," he said. "I read about it in the paper, and then someone came to make a presentation at our church. When I heard the presentation, I was fairly convinced this was a good organization, so I offered 6 acres of land for a project." Lorne's church, Clifford United (together with other churches in the area who joined later) has been running the Clifford Hanover Oakville Growing Project since 1995. In addition to the growing project, they have also held fundraising auction sales. In total, their donations amount to $119,752.25 since they began.

This year, Lorne was looking for another way to contribute. That's when he came up with the idea of a picnic table. "I'd heard about a group in Markdale who built the world's longest picnic table as a fundraiser and I thought 'we could do that'."

Together with a group of volunteers, Lorne set out to top the previous record and build the world's longest white cedar picnic table. Some people told him it was a crazy idea, but he responded by becoming more determined than ever. "I'm the kind of guy who flies by the seat of his pants, and if someone tells me it can't be done, I look for a way to do it. If you're not willing to fail, then you'll never try anything." Gradually, Lorne managed to convince people to join him, including the Hanover Home Hardware who donated screws, bolts, and stain to the cause. The lumber was purchased from Moses Weaver at Scone at a discount.

Although it will take some time to make the record official with the team at Guinness Book of World Records, Lorne is confident that they topped the record. At 126 feet 2 inches, it's almost 26 feet longer than the original. To ensure accuracy, Lorne invited the local politicians out to the International Plowing Match, where the table was on display, to do the actual measuring.

The table will be cut into 6, 7, and 8 foot lengths and auctioned off to the highest bidder. Before being sold, each section will be branded by a local wood-branding expert with the logos of Canadian Foodgrains Bank and the International Plowing Match.

The picnic table won't be the last of Lorne's dedication to the Foodgrains Bank. The memory of that chicken continues to motivate him. When I asked him what he's planning next, he chuckled. "I've got a few ideas, but I don't think I'll talk about them yet." It's clear that Lorne is committed to the work of ending hunger. "When you're passionate about something," he says, "you just can't get around it. It drives you."

B. Momin's Pumpkin- By Heather Plett

http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca/testimonial/583/momin_s_pumpkin.aspx

The pumpkin plant grows healthy and strong, as though there were nothing out of the ordinary about its surroundings or its origins as a plant. The sun glints through the trees and touches on a health, round, and nearly ripe pumpkin peeking out from between the leaves.

It's such an ordinary thing, this pumpkin plant. For a passerby, it holds no particular meaning. But as Rina Fokir points to it and tells us her story, tears well up in her eyes.

On November 14th, Rina's 3 year old daughter Momin planted the seed in the ground that would result in this healthy pumpkin plant. It was just an ordinary day, with mother and daughter doing ordinary things. Perhaps they were even singing. There was hope in that little seed being buried in the ground.

The next day, November 15th, at 9:30 at night, Cyclone Sidr hit their village. In the dark, Momin's father Mamnan clung to his daughter with one hand, while trying desperately to hold onto a tree trunk with the other. A thirty foot wave washed over them, taking with it their home and everything they owned. Despite

her father's frantic attempts to save her, and Momin's own attempt to clutch her mother's hair, the little girl was swept away by the wave, never to be seen again.

Now, 4 months later, Rina and Mamnan try to rebuild their lives. With whatever bits and pieces of metal and wood the wave left washed up on the land, they've patched together a makeshift home near the empty foundation of their former home. In front of the concrete steps where their home once stood, the pumpkin plant still grows strong and healthy. Every day, it reminds them of the little girl who planted it.

Weeping, Rina returns to her crooked patchwork house. She sits inside the doorway, wiping the tears from her eyes. The rest of my group wander off to visit another family, but I am left rooted to the ground like that pumpkin plant. My mother heart tears apart as I think of my own small child at home, just a few years older than Momin. My own tears come as I meet Rina's eyes.

What can I say to her? What gesture can I leave with her that shows that I am not just a voyeuristic foreigner come to take pictures of her grief? I step closer to her home and put my hand on my heart as I gaze across the remains of her old home into her eyes.

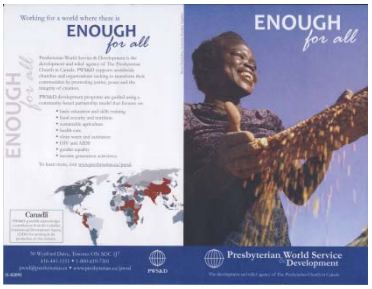
"I'm sorry," I say, my voice choking. "So sorry." I know she can't understand my words, but perhaps there is something in our shared motherhood that reaches across the distance of different lifestyles, different countries, and different languages and touches her broken heart.

Note: The Fokir family live in the village of Lobon Ghola, Bangladesh. Shortly after Cyclone Sidr hit their village, they received rice provided by Canadian Foodgrains Bank (working through member agencies CRWRC, EMCC, MCC, NCM, and The Salvation Army and their overseas partners). A follow-up project will provide rice as food-for-work as they rebuild their community.

C. Enough for All

http://www.presbyterian.ca/webfm_send/2171

God whisper, "Here I am. Here I am."



Today, we still seek to find the presence of God in this world. PWS&D is one place where our church is working to fight poverty and discrimination, bring hope and opportunity to the less fortunate, and work for a world where there is enough for all.

Recently, a group of Presbyterians from across Canada travelled to Malawi. They were part of a Presbyterian Church in Canada study tour sent to witness first-hand the work that our denomination is doing there in response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. It was a profoundly moving experience for all the participants as they saw not only the devastation AIDS is having on the population, but also the compassion, hope and difference The Presbyterian Church is making in the lives of countless men, women and children in that impoverished nation. They visited the PWS&D programs that are supporting orphans, caring for the sick and fighting stigma and discrimination. One member of the team was taken by a local guide to the home of a woman who had recently been assigned a homebased care worker, who had been trained, with the aid of PWS&D funding, to care for people living with HIV. It was a considerable distance through a deeply impoverished neighbourhood to get to the patient's home.

When they arrived, the tour member's heart broke. The patient was a young woman, probably in her mid-twenties, and she was obviously suffering from an advanced state of AIDS. Her eyes were sunken and lifeless. She was malnourished and she was using whatever energy she had left to nurse her infant twins. When the woman was asked through the interpreter when she had last had something to eat she answered, "Three days ago."

When the group was about to leave, the ailing woman requested a prayer. When the tour member knelt to hold her hand he thought to himself, no human being should have to live like this. No child of God should live in these conditions. However, when he finished his prayer, he said he heard the inner voice of God who whispered, "Here I am. Here I am."

A Bag of Tools
Isn't it strange
That princes and kings,
And clowns that caper
In sawdust rings,
And common people
Like you and me
Are builders for eternity?
Each is given a bag of tools,
A shapeless mass,
A Book of rules;
And each must make,
Ere life is flown,
A stumbling block
Or a stepping stone. (R. L. Sharpe)

Are God's gift and the talents in our lives stumbling block or stepping stone?

God is there every day of our lives and he is whispering to us: HERE I AM (Isaiah 58:9)

Will we respond to Him: **"Here I am Lord,"** send me and trust me to serveYOU and my fellow borthers and sisters, with all I have, with all you entrusted to me… Here I am Lord, send me, in a world where there can be enough for all…

AMEN

Note: PWS&D Sunday material and bulletin insert is provided by PCC Toronto Office. This sermon is based on the material provided.