

Opening

- Two different investments
 - Back in the mid-90's, my wife Tamra and I made the decision to invest in a new business venture and we opened a Mr. Goodcents restaurant.
 - We invested everything we had in it
 - I mean every dollar
 - Every minute of the day
 - Every thought we had
 - Every breath we took went into the business
 - And after about 5 years, we had an offer to sell the business and we decided it was time to focus more on family and so we sold the business
 - And the result was a five-fold return on our investment
 - A pretty good deal, don't you think?
 - I mean, if someone said to you “Give me \$1000 today and I'll invest it for you and I guarantee that in five years, I will return to you \$5,000,” wouldn't you think that is a pretty good deal?
 - So, yes, the restaurant business was very good to me and I'm glad I made that investment.
 - Around that same time an associate of mine brought to me an opportunity to partner with him and invest in another business- a hotel over in Kansas City
 - And I explored the offer, looked at the business plan and even drove out to the site to look at where the hotel would be built.
 - Now I didn't know the people with whom I was investing, but my friend vouched for them, that they were solid business people- that they were movers and shakers in the community who had a long track record of success
 - So, I agreed and my friend and I matched our funds and made a small investment

- My friend suggested that we could take an even larger stake in the venture, but I wasn't comfortable putting in that much money, so our investment was moderately small
 - And I'm glad it was small, because the only thing I ever received from that investment was a tax write-off
 - A few years later, this same friend, who was just sure this hotel would pay off big came to me with another "big payoff" opportunity
 - And what do you think my answer was?
 - That's right, I told him "Thanks, but no thanks. I'm just not interested"
- Two different investments- two different returns
 - In one the amount I invested, was multiplied and in the other, not at all
 - Today, I'd like to think I'm wiser with my investing, than to pour resources into something, without knowing as much as I can about it
 - I've learned that I need to have a great deal of trust in the people who help me manage my resources
 - I've learned that how I invest the resources I have is vital to making the most of them, so that they will have the greatest impact

The Parable

- In today's reading, the Parable of the Talents, Jesus offers a similar situation.
 - Jesus tells the story of a wealthy master who is going away on a trip and whom entrusts his wealth into the hands of three different servants, for them to manage it, while he is away
 - And the amount of money he leaves behind is a vast amount- the worth of a talent by today's standards, being somewhere north of a million dollars
 - So, you see, to one servant, the master entrusted 5 talents, or over 5 million dollars, to another he entrusted over three million dollars and to the third servant, the master entrusted one talent, or just over a million dollars
 - Two of the servants- the ones to whom the master entrusted the most- they were faithful and invested wisely

- And they doubled their talents
 - And God's response was "Well done!"
- But one servant
 - The one to whom the master entrusted the least- did nothing
 - He simply buried the talent in the ground
 - And upon his return, the master was not pleased
 - He takes the talent from the servant and sends him away
- Jesus uses this parable, as an allegory for how we are to live our lives
 - In telling this story, Jesus is saying that all of us are managers of God's resources
 - And the parable tells us that in the end, God is going to hold an accounting and ask, "What did you do with all that you had?"
 - These servants are financial managers, acting on behalf of their master
 - In the same way, we are financial managers of God's resources
 - And just like the servants in the parable, God has entrusted to you, vast wealth- God has entrusted to you:
 - Every hour of the day
 - Every breath you take
 - The food you eat
 - Your health and wellbeing
 - The number of days of your life
 - The freedom to make choices
 - The natural resources around you
 - And the financial talents that you have
 - These are all the gifts of "life", which God has entrusted to your care
 - These are gifts which God intends for you to use in your life- between the day of your birth and the day you depart this world
 - You didn't bring these gifts with you into this life
 - And you don't get to take them with you when you depart

- And in the final day, God will ask “How did you invest the life I gave you?”
- As we head towards Stewardship Commitment Sunday next week, that really is the question for each of us to ponder, you know?
- “How will you invest?”

Last week

- Last week Sandra talked about excellence in giving, as she shared the Apostle Paul’s encouragement to Christians living in Corinth to be generous in their support
 - In her message we were encouraged be excellent in our own generosity
 - We were encouraged towards excellence in our giving, as we pursue the biblical tithe of 10%
 - In his letter, Paul writes of Christ’s generosity as the example of excellence
 - “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”
 - Christ had everything- and he gave up everything for you and for me
 - Knowing that Christ gave up everything for us:
 - How will we invest?
 - Will we invest our talents wisely?
 - Will we pursue excellence in generosity as we give to Christ’s church?

It’s about more than money

- You know, when we talk about being generous and investing our talents, we’re talking about more than just our financial talents
- And I want to share a little bit of what investing our talents looks like
 - It looks a little bit like a blessing box, a post where people who need some food can help themselves
 - You know a few people came up with that idea and now it’s become a project of the whole church
 - And every Wednesday morning the men’s Bible study group takes a turn to re-stock it with goods
 - Now, the idea of the blessing box, wasn’t the group’s idea, but now we’re a small part of the mission to keep the box filled with blessings.

- And the blessing box- that is the parable of the talent
 - It's people using their talents in ways that make a difference in the world.
 - That's the way that works, you know
 - One or two people ignite a spark and pretty soon others are joining in to help
 - Many years ago at Christmas, I suggested to a group of my colleagues that instead of the usual white-elephant gift exchange, that we take the money we'd normally spend and donate it to the Rescue Mission.
 - They all agreed and so I collected the money- I think it was about \$100 and I took it down and gave it to the Rescue Mission
 - And from then on, that became our Christmas tradition
 - Years later- long after I had left the company, I bumped in to one of those colleagues and she said to me "you know, I still give money to the Rescue Mission at Christmas"
 - That's the way that works when we seek to change the world and make it a better place.
 - How will you invest?
- What does investing look like?
 - Hold up bulletin insert
 - Investing is making plans to deliver 100 thanksgiving meals to needy families this year
 - Investing is inviting people to an Advent night, where families can enjoy a dinner, arts and crafts, stories and Christmas carols
 - Investing is offering hungry, vulnerable children a safe place to get food after-school
 - Investing is offering a festive place for a meal and worship and singing on Wednesdays at noon during the holiday season.
- That my friends, is a glimpse of what investing looks like
 - Investing is building up the kingdom of God
 - It's practicing generosity towards people outside of this church

- Investing is people in this place, looking at life- looking at the talents we've been given and asking how can we make a difference in the lives of other people
- It's pouring ourselves into people in ways that raise them up
- It's taking action to change the world and make it a better place
- It's people- like you - bearing witness to Christ and inviting others to be part of that.
- And when I think about God looking down upon all of this, I can't help but hear God saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servants."
- And here's the thing folks- we're just getting started
 - If it's been a while since you read the consultant's report from a year ago, you might want to pick it up and dust it off
 - Because there is the blueprint for turning around God's ministry here
 - We've come a long way in executing that blueprint, but there is still much to be done and in many ways, we're just getting started.
 - At FPC we have BIG plans to put that newly remodeled kitchen to use, as we serve the community inside and outside this church.
 - We have BIG plans for growing new small groups to invest in other people and to connect them with this church.
 - We are taking steps to make reaching outward the new norm for ministry as we explore ways to make the world a better place.
 - We are getting out into the community to listen, learn and connect and to be the face of Jesus in a world which desperately needs a Savior.
- Now all of this takes time and it takes a lot of talent <PAUSE>
- Commitment Sunday is next Sunday
 - And as we each ponder what we will do to add our share to God's mission, remember that God isn't just asking for your financial resources
 - Those are very important, yes, but God is asking for so much more
 - God is asking for your talents- God is asking for your whole life
 - God is asking you to make a commitment, that:
 - Everything within you
 - Everything you have

- Everything you are
- And everything you do
- Will be shaped by your desire to grow God's Kingdom
- I assure you that if you'll make that commitment, when you arrive to the end of your days, there will be such great joy knowing that you left it all on the field
 - That you did everything you could and invested wisely
 - And you'll have no disappointments- and neither will God
 - There will be only joy and God will say, "Well done, my good and faithful steward."
- I'll ask you once more.
- How will you invest?
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- Amen!