

Out of Fear and Into Joy

Pastor Bridget Jones

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This is one of those ones where it feels like the response should be a question, right? Like *Praise to you, O Christ?*

I think the third slave here gets kind of a raw end of the deal. It seems not fair.

First of all, it says in the very beginning that this master hands out this money based on skill. So already the master is kind of thinking, *the one with one talent is not going to do a very good job*. It feels like a little bit of a set-up.

Then, of course, you have someone with no money and he gives them a talent. In today's wages, a talent is about \$300,000. So, if you imagine having no money your entire life, and then someone says, *Hey, can you just hold onto this \$300,000 for me?*

They're going on a journey, they're coming back, and they want it back. That's terrifying.

So, he doesn't have a lot of skills, he has way more money than he's ever handled in his entire life, and he is so afraid of losing everything because this is a harsh master.

Then, on top of that, he has **less**. He has less than everyone else. There's someone who has five talents, there's someone with two talents, and he only has one talent. Everybody else is doing so much better than him. It seems unfair from the beginning.

And so, in fear he hunkers down. Instead of thinking:
What an opportunity. What can I do with this?

He thinks:

This is a setup. I'm going to get in trouble. Better to just dig a hole, bury it in the hole, and that will be safe.

He thinks:

Maybe if you just hold on so tightly, you won't feel so scared and resentful.

But that's not what happens, is it?

Because in the end, that's not what that talent was for. It wasn't for being buried. It was for going out and making more money. The money was not given to the slaves for their own enjoyment. It was to continue the work of the master.

So, when the master comes back he is so excited to see his other slaves were trustworthy. They were able to say:

I think I know what you would do with this. I think I'll try to do that as well. The markets were going well this year and I came back and here I've made more.

And the master says:

Welcome into the joy. Enter into the joy of your master.

The master is doing joyful work, and the others became part of that. But the third slave missed out. He did not become part of

the work of the master. He instead took his money, and he buried it.

He was living in fear the whole time, and he is cast out and does not get to participate further.

I think I feel a lot for this third slave, because sometimes I feel like this third servant. I don't feel like I have a lot of skills when it comes to money and (sorry, accountant dad) I don't have a budget. I just don't. The stock markets confuse me, so I let my retirement fund do its retirement fund thing and I just leave it there.

I feel unskilled. I sometimes feel scared.

When I did a year of Lutheran Volunteer Corps, I got paid about \$800 a month. I paid \$400 a month in rent, so I lived on about \$400 a month. And all it took was that one year to feel like I have nothing, and I never have enough.

That was almost a decade ago, but I still feel that fear. It stays with you.

I'm living on a lot more than \$400 a month now, but there's that fear that I'm going to lose it. I got to hold on carefully. I got to batten down the hatches.

And sometimes it's easy to look around and see who has more. It feels like everyone has more. It's easy to see where I have less.

And so I, too, sometimes want to hunker down and think that maybe if I hold on tightly enough to what I've got, I won't feel so scared and resentful all the time.

But that's not why God gave me time and talents and resources and money. *That's not what that's for.*

It's not so that I would be scared all the time. It's not for my own contentment. It's not just so that I could make myself happy all the time. It's so that God can say:

Enter into the joy of your master.

Enter into the joy of what God is doing.

God is doing joyful things all over the world.

If I take what I've been given—just dig a hole and bury it in hopes that it just stays the same—then I'm going to miss out and gnash my own teeth all by myself.

God is inviting us into joy, into using what we've been given to be co-creators. Inviting us to join the business of what God is doing all over the world, to invest in the flourishing of creation.

That's what the saints in Macedonia knew. They didn't notice their extreme poverty; they are *begging* to be part of what God is doing. They hear about the need in Jerusalem, and these new Christians say:

Please let us help.

Please let us help.

Here's what we have.

We want to be part of it.

To be honest, holding onto my money hasn't made me any less anxious about it, right? And I want to stop gnashing my teeth. I want to stop being cast out. I want to stop refusing to participate. And I want to enter into the joy of what God is doing.

I still don't have a budget, so I don't exactly know where this time and money is going to come from. But that's okay, because I know where it's going, right?

I know where it's going when I give to this community. I know that it goes to:

It goes to leading this community in worship

It goes to raising up the next generation in faith

It goes to visiting the sick and the isolated.

It goes to feeding the hungry.

It goes to welcoming and engaging.

Some of it goes to the synod and to the churchwide, and then it goes even further to spread hope and healing and good news throughout this broken world.

I know it is going to where the kingdom of heaven is breaking through in this world—here in Auburn and around the globe—creating a world where even more people get to enter into joy. I want to be part of that, and I think I'm gonna.

Thanks be to God.