

An IRS office had a sign at the entrance: "Watch your step." There was a sign over the exit: "Watch your language."

Today's gospel could rightly be titled "Captivated by the Carpenter." Here professional fishermen, who had been previously unsuccessful – find that listening to the voice of the carpenter leads them to results that were overwhelming. They had underestimated Jesus' purpose and power, not to mention His love. Jesus was not about to leave them, nor was He going to let them get away too easily. He had a plan and purpose for their lives. And from their encounter with Jesus in the boat that day – they got a whole new perspective. Once we 'get' Jesus – we 'get' gratitude. And when we get gratitude – we get stewardship. Because we know we are loved – and called – and gifted – and the endless possibilities that will enrich our lives – even in moments of loss and sadness.

Today's gospel teaches us that Jesus refused to agree that Peter – or we – are unworthy. Jesus does not deny our weakness – but assures us that we really have no idea what we can accomplish if we let Him lead the way. It is His love that makes His offer irresistible. Luke tells us this story so that we can find ourselves in it. As we read the Gospel, we will note that the extraordinary catch was just that. Their days were not filled with unmitigated success. But that one experience had caught them up in Jesus' net. They saw enough to know that they couldn't imagine what was possible – and that was the good news Jesus preached. The question that stewardship asks us is whether we are willing to allow Jesus to commandeer our boats. (last paragraph help from CELEBRATION, 10 February 2019, p. 2)

So I'd like to take a look at the three-legged stool of stewardship – time, talent, and treasure. We cannot have one without the other two. Discipleship asks of us our hearts – nothing more and nothing less. And once we have given over our heart – we will find true peace and happiness. That does not mean we will not be without trial, difficulties and pain. But there will be a peace which surpasses all understanding through it all.

Time. The fact is that all time is good. It is learning why this is true that is so difficult. (Joan Chittister, THERE IS A SEASON, p. 6) This is one of life's great truths, and not quickly or easily grasped. We tend to despise the times in our life where sickness or death or disappointment visit us. But all time is good, for it is a gift of God. A story illustrates this. There was once a king who desired to be a great and just ruler. He heard about an old hermit renowned for his holiness and insight. Accompanied by a small band of knights, the king made his way to the old man's cottage. As he approached the hermit's small hut, he ordered his men to remain behind. The king then put on the cloak of a commoner and walked to the hermitage alone.

The king found the hermit digging in his small garden. The king said: "I have come to you, wise hermit, to ask you 3 questions: How can I learn to do the right thing at the right time? Who are the people I most need, and whom should I pay more attention to than others? And how can I know what is the right thing to do?"

The hermit listened, but said nothing; he continued his digging. The king saw that the work was taxing on the frail old man, so the king offered to help, and the hermit handed him the shovel and the king took over the work of digging new garden beds.

As he worked, the king repeated his 3 questions, but before the hermit could answer, they saw a man stumbling up the path to the hermitage. Blood flowed from a gash in the man's stomach. The king and the

hermit caught the man just as he collapsed. The king and the hermit washed and treated his wound and gave him fresh water to drink.

The next morning, the man woke up and immediately recognized the king changing his bandage. "Forgive me, my lord," the man said, trembling. "Forgive you? For what?" The king asked.

"I am your enemy," the man explained. "In an uprising against you, you killed my brother and seized our lands. I followed you here intending to kill you. But as I came to the hermitage, your men recognized me and wounded me. I managed to escape but would have bled to death had you not cared for me. I owe you my life and I am now at your service for the rest of my days."

Deeply moved to be reconciled with an old enemy, the king forgave the man and promised to return his lands. The king then called for his knights to take the man back to his own castle where the man could be properly cared for.

The king then again asked the hermit his three questions. The hermit said simply, "But you have answered them." "How? "When?" the perplexed king asked.

"Do you not see that if you had not pitied my weakness yesterday and had not dug those beds for me but had gone on your way, that man would have ambushed you and killed you? So the most important time was when you were digging my garden; I was the most important person; and the good you did for me was the most important business. Later, when the man came to us bleeding and near death, had you not cared for him he would have died without making peace with you. The most important person was the man and your care was the most important thing you could do and the right time was when you were doing it.

"Remember then that the most important time is now because the present is the only time we have control over. The most necessary person is the person in need. And the most important pursuit is to do good for others, for it is for that purpose alone that God has sent us into this life." (Adapted from FABLES AND FAIRY TALES, Leo Tolstoy)

We all have time. We need to pay attention to it – for God has a plan and purpose for every moment. Stewardship teaches us to use our time in service to others – and to love well.

Second, talent. A talent is a gift from God. How we use it is our gift to God. We all know the gospel story of the Master who went away and left 3 servants in charge, giving one man 5 talents, one man 2 talents and one man one talent. We remember that the one with 5 made 5 more, the one with 2 made 2 more, and the one with one talent simply buried it. I wonder if comparing his one talent with the multiple talents of the others made him feel inadequate or insignificant. I wonder if he felt angry toward the other servants – or perhaps even toward the master. Maybe burying his talent was a passive way of getting even with the master for not giving him more.

I think this issue explains why Jesus has THREE servants in this story. Usually, in stories that involve pleasing versus displeasing responses to God, Jesus simply has 2 characters – like the wise and foolish builder, or the Pharisee versus the publican. But here there are 3 characters, and Jesus – who is a master storyteller – needs them to establish a very important point.

In this story there are 2 variables. First, there are varying amounts of gifts. One man gets 5, one gets 2, and a third gets one. In this detail I think Jesus is simply reflecting life as we experience it. Some people are

gifted in ways that will be visible and celebrated in this world; others are gifted in ways that remain quiet and unseen.

The variable that does matter is what each servant does with what they've been given. Here there are 3 servants because Jesus wants to make it painstakingly clear that the size of the gift is not the crucial variable. Even though the first servant receives a gift much larger than the second, the master responds in identical fashion to each of them. Jesus wants us to understand that the visible level of giftedness and calling is not the hinge point. Whether we are a 5-talent, 2-talent or 1-talent person is not the what counts in the long run.

We must refuse to compare my talents with anyone else. Comparison will lead to pride and a false sense of superiority if I'm ahead of someone, and misery if I'm left behind. Or worse, I will discount and bury the irreplaceable treasure that the Lord of the Gift has given to me alone.

Have we been comparing what we've been given with someone else – physical appearance, intelligence, relationships, accomplishments, energy level, or temperament? We must come to identify, cultivate, invest, prize, and enjoy the gifts that have been given to us. The Lord of the Gift is very wise. He knew exactly what He was doing when He created each one of us. He is well-pleased that we exist. He has entrusted to us everything we need to fulfill the purpose for which we were created.

At the end of the day, God will not ask us why we didn't lead someone else's life or invest someone else's gifts. He will not ask, *What did you do with what you didn't have?*

But He will ask, *what did you do with what you had?* (adapted from Ortberg, IF YOU WANT TO WALK ON WATER, YOU'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THE BOAT, p. 42-43)

Third, treasure, tithing. A rich old couple was sitting in Church when the collection basket came around. "Don't put in more than a dollar," advised the old lady. "Look Gladys," said her husband, "Andrew Carnegie gave over half a million for his seat in heaven. John D. Rockefeller gave over a million. Where do you think we're going to sit for a dollar?" St. Paul wrote "God loves a cheerful giver." The original Greek word he used was HILARON for cheerful, which translates into English as *hilarious*. I prefer hilarious, because it is a word that goes way beyond cheerful, as if we can't control some inner outpouring of emotion.

A father had given his son a ten dollar bill and 5 ones. He told his son the 10 dollar bill was for the offering at church and then he could use the 5 ones to buy an ice cream cone later. When they got home the father was dismayed to see his son still had the ten dollar bill. When he inquired, the son replied, "But Father said God loves a cheerful giver and I knew I could be a whole lot more cheerful giving 5 dollars than 10!"

We all have part of that kid in our heart. But we are called to something more. Mature persons feel responsible for the world and our position in that world. You and I have won the lottery just by being in these United States. We benefit from the mysterious meeting of genes that situates us in the middle class of a rich country. That unearned accident obliges us. (PREACHING RESOURCES, Dec 9, 2012, p 4) Sadly, almost 2/3 of this parish don't understand this – they give nothing, or next to nothing in the offertory.

God doesn't just want us to give a tithe of 10% of our gross income. God wants us to recognize Him as the owner of everything – and to diligently embrace our role as stewards of what we have and hold on His behalf. And eventually, one way or another, He's taking it all back. Tithing is just the threshold – the place to get started. (THE STORY OF A CATHOLIC PARISH REBUILT, White & Corcoran, p. 180)

How much should you give? The Scripture says 10%. But only you can answer that question honestly. Tithing is the teaching. What do you do with it? But here are some things to consider – and to pray about. How much is enough? When multimillionaire John D. Rockefeller was asked “How much money is enough?” He responded: “Just a little more.” It doesn’t seem to matter how much money we have; we always tend to think we need more. How much would we have to give away to feel it? We tend to give away a small fraction of our surplus. The truth is we never really needed it to begin with. Sacrificial giving goes beyond, to a place where our giving actually requires us to go without something. 10% is not going to do that to very many in this parish. How much do we have? Most of us have enough to be generous. What does God want us to do with our money? Many of us spend very little time thinking about this question, which shows that we don’t take our roles as stewards seriously.

So, this is my challenge to you. Do you think that you are a generous person? Here is a challenge. Take some time over the next week or 2 and calculate what you gave to church, charities, and people in need last year as a percentage of your annual income. And once you have that number, I challenge you to give one percent more of your income this year than you did last year. Furthermore, I challenge you to increase this giving percentage by one percent of your income each year until you reach a tithe of 10% -- or until it simply is not possible or prudent for you to give any more. Goals bring out the best in us. We have goals for everything else; isn’t it time we have some generosity goals? We will be amazed how this proactive approach to giving changes our perspective. Now rather than waiting until we are asked to give we will be looking for opportunities to give. (adapted from Matthew Kelly, THE FOUR SIGNS OF A DYNAMIC CATHOLIC, p. 134-135)

Gratitude is the very heart of the spiritual life. To come to know that God created us in love, sustains every breath we take – even and especially in times of trial, difficulty, or pain -- is to be in eternal debt to a goodness, love and mercy that is greater than anything we could ask for or even imagine. It is to have discovered the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field. It is what prompts Isaiah to respond: “Here I am – send me!” and the disciples to put out into the deep and lower their nets, despite their failure to catch anything all night long.

This my friends is what gives our life meaning and purpose in the pursuit of what is good, right, true and beautiful. It is to fall in love with a God who is madly in love with us. So may it be for you and for me. Amen.