

On first glance...there is just so much wrong with this reading today!

First of all: it appears that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer....

not exactly good news!

On one hand, you've got two guys who play by the greedy Master's rules and values...

they are rewarded for their efforts!

Then on the other hand there's the poor slave who was so scared of his master

because he *knew* what a scoundrel he was...

he's tossed into the darkness and condemned to pain and suffering...

And, to add insult to injury, the Master doesn't even deny

his nastiness: he admits that he's dishonest and greedy:

"You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter???"

Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers and on my return I would

have received what was my own with interest!"

Remember borrowing and lending money *and* earning interest

was against Jewish law at this time!

What in the world is going on here!?!

Every Biblical scholar that I consulted noted all the troubles with this story

that I have just mentioned.

They all said that we must remember this is meant to be an allegorical story about the end time...

If you recall, that in an allegory every person is supposed to represent or symbolize someone or something else, you have to wonder who the Master represents...and if it represents God, which most think it does, then what kind of God does it represent???"

And...an important question for us: do you want to follow this kind God???"

mmmmm....

Now the most common way preachers get around this dilemma has is to ignore the Master and to interpret the ‘talents’ not as money but as our gifts and special abilities...

Most of the time the sermon revolves around making sure that we use whatever gifts or talents we have been given for service in the world....

all well and good....

Yet, as convenient and easy as that is to preach...it isn’t what this reading is about....

So, of course you might be asking: what, pray tell, then is it about?

Now that’s a little bit trickier.

Most contemporary scholars believe that Jesus probably did not tell this story in this way.

It is true that in Matthew you can find plenty of wailing and gnashing of teeth, a lot of fire and brimstone...and that, the scholars say, is because the Gospel of Matthew was written by a Jew for a Jewish community who believed in Jesus...

The style and content of the Gospel fits their culture and their tradition....

But...that all that fire, hell and brimstone is not in the other Gospels...

The two biggest problems with this Gospel are these:

- 1. the image of the Master when placed upon God the Father and**
- 2. the plight of the slave who chose to bury the one talent he had been given because he was so afraid of what might have happened to him because the Master was such a scoundrel!**

So, scholars now are looking at this Gospel with the eyes and the ears of a first century peasant and they are coming up with another perspective...

So let’s imagine what a first century listener might be thinking when they hear Matthew’s story...

If you were a slave during the time of Jesus, the Master and the success of the first two slaves would just be pure same old, same old.

You would probably be wishing and hoping to be as successful as the successful slaves but you could also probably very easily identify with the poor guy who was thrown in the darkness....

Contemporary scholars remind us that the ancient world view was one where wealth was a limited commodity...

so for some to have more, meant others would have to have less....

It is as if all the world's resources were a pie...

and for someone to have a larger piece of the pie

that necessarily meant that someone else would have to have a smaller piece...

But we don't see wealth that way in the 21st century...

Those of us in a capitalistic economy see the growth of the GNP, the growth of the stock market as never ending.

Many believe in the trickle down theory...that if the rich can get richer... then it raises everyone's standard of living...

With those economic realities in mind...

Contemporary scholars see this Gospel as having two challenges for our modern world:

1. It challenges the belief in the possibility of ever increasing wealth and the greed that often comes with it and

and 2. it challenges us to be wise and cautious as we challenge those

who use their power and their wealth to become even wealthier and more powerful

...the Masters of our Day

Discipleship is the willingness to live a life in accordance with the values that Jesus.

Discipleship is no easy task...it is a risky way of life.

While discipleship has its rewards: deep peace and true joy

it can also very often lead to ridicule and marginalization.

To preach and to practice Love of your Enemy is not popular!

To preach and to practice Forgiveness 70 x 7 is not popular!

**To preach and to practice not judging, generosity beyond one's circle of friends and family,
and mercy rather than punishment... is just not popular....**

so why in the world would anyone do it? be it? or practice it?

Well...that's a question we each must answer for ourselves...

Why do we come here week after week?

Why do we listen to the stories and you listen to me ramble on?

Why do we teach our children the ways of Jesus?

Why do we affirm the ultimate compassion and love of God for all beings?

Well, like I see that's worth pondering...but my answer to those questions is this...

deep down, when I pause and truly listen, deeply feel...

when I listen with the ear of my heart

rather than the tit for tat logic of my mind

I recognize the beauty and the joy and the peace of the teachings of Jesus....

I can feel the Truth, capital T, of his teachings...

I can remember who I most deeply and truly am, in his teachings...

Are his teachings easy?

no.

Are they popular?

obviously not

Do they make me more successful?

well, not really, at least the common way...

But

**the wisdom of his Teachings leads me to a place
that is more real and more valuable than anything else I know...**

Unfortunately, following his teachings is risky business.

**We are very fortunate because we can practice our beliefs
without the fear of persecution, but certainly hasn't always been that way!
and it isn't that way still in some countries...**

So, for each of us who gather here this day,

the question must be answered:

What is that we are truly seeking?

What are we willing to bear and

what are we willing to risk...

Why do we seek to follow his ways?

Good questions,

necessary questions,

but not easy questions...

What is your answer?

Amen.