

WHY WAS THE THIRD GUY AFRAID?

We all know this gospel story. We have a read on what it's about. We expect to hear that we have to use the talents God has given us, etc., etc. Let's try to hear this story in a new way with a new set of ears. First off, the man going on the journey calls in his servants and entrusts what is important to him to them—in accordance with each person's ability. So this isn't really a story about the talents and abilities we already have been given by God, this is something more, something different.

The talents—5 or 2 or 1—stand for something else? Not our natural talents and abilities. Something entrusted to us, something we need, something we were to benefit from if we use it correctly, something we don't have in and of ourselves. What for instance? Well let me tell you a true story and then ask a question.

For twenty years or more there was a woman in this area who suffered from paranoia and schizophrenia although she hated those designations. She called the Rectory every day. Every day. Typically five times in a day. Sometimes ten. Sometimes twenty. We tried many things to dissuade her. Nothing worked. She always called on the second phone line. She thought we had put it in specifically for her. All the staff knew her. All spoke with her. Every night she would call me and ask how my day was. Every night. It would not be unusual for me to return to the Rectory on a Sunday evening and find 13 messages on the answering machine all from Elizabeth. She would persist until she got through to me. And so every night for over 20 years I spoke to a paranoid schizophrenic woman about how my day was and her day was.

In that time I got to ask a lot of questions—about her voices. I asked her why she didn't stop listening to them because she knew they told her to do bad things. She told me she couldn't stop listening. Why not? I'm afraid to stop listening. Why? They make me special. No one else has these voices. That's who I am. I'm the woman who hears voices. It was an identity thing with her. She was afraid to take the risk of not listening to the voices because she was afraid of what that might cost her.

The third guy in the story is afraid, afraid of what it might cost him, afraid of the demands it might make on him. So he gives in to the fear. That's the thing. That's why the master is angry upon his return. Would the master have been angry if the man had given portions of it to those who were in need? I don't think so. It's that he gave into the fear.

A few more questions. Do you believe that each of us has the capacity to enjoy a gorgeous sunset in the evening sky? I do. But many times we just keep our heads down and fail to see what is right there. What are we afraid of? Why are we afraid to raise our heads and look up at the beauty all around us? Are we so busy we can no longer enjoy? Or that if we dared look up we would get distracted from our purpose? Or is it that we no longer believe there is beauty all around us?

Another question. How many of you think that your prayer life is less than you want it to be? Less than it could be? So what's the obstacle? What are you afraid of? Many years ago when I was in my early twenties and still in the seminary prayer meetings emerged as a new thing. A group of guys would gather in a room. Sit on the floor or a chair and be quiet and then if someone felt moved to share a thought or insight they would do so. If someone felt moved to pray aloud they would do so. I remember being really afraid of praying aloud like that. I was afraid that others would judge my prayer as inferior or not measuring up. I was also afraid of something else. I was afraid that if I really opened up my soul to God that God would make impossible demands on me and then I would be sunk. But I took that risk. Learned how to pray aloud what was going on inside my heart and it has made such a great difference in my life. I have been part of a prayer groups of priests for over 45 years. We still

meet monthly. We share our faith and we pray aloud. It nourishes and sustains us. We were each afraid but we stepped out of the fear and took the risk.

Another question. What if the talent represents a capacity of some kind? What do I mean? A capacity that I would like to have but am not sure I really do have. For example. What if the talent given to each one in accordance with his abilities is the capacity to give love and the capacity to receive love? But this capacity has to be received, accepted and worked with if it is going to have a beneficial effect. But if I am afraid to love or more likely, if I am afraid to receive love, let love in on the other person's terms to the degree he or she wants to give it, in the manner they want to give it, then nothing will ever happen. I will just live in my fear. And that is why the Master gets angry at the third guy. He doesn't take the risk. He won't take the risk.

My friends, we have to take risks in this life if we are to become our true selves. If we let our fears control our decisions we will miss becoming who we are. We will not learn the one essential lesson we are to learn while we are on this earth—how to give love and how to receive love in turn. Because that is what goes on in the kingdom of God. That is how we are going to live for all eternity. And only that way. Even Jesus in his humanity had to learn how to do this and step out in risk.