



Sunday, November 15, 2020

## Talent Show

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*Psalm 123; Matthew 25:14-30*

So, the Parable of the Talents. It says: Take what we are given, put it to use. Have a positive impact on others, and on the world. Do something with your talents.

There are lots of ways we could proceed with this idea. One would be to tell a Pittsburgh talent story. So here goes:

By the age of six, a young girl from Charleroi, Pennsylvania, had shown signs of extraordinary talent by becoming the youngest member of her church choir. Recognizing her gifted and natural singing ability, her parents took her to see one of Pittsburgh's top vocal coaches. Once a week, her father was more than happy to drive her fifty miles to the big city for her hour-long vocal lessons. After graduating from high school in 1952, she was spotted by a scout photographer for the 1952 Miss Pittsburgh Pageant. She entered the contest and won. I am guessing you know who she is, because her talent — then and now, and all the years in between — was not hidden in the ground.

Sometimes it is good to share a story like this, to bring the parable into sharper focus, and to ask, "How does that relate to who I am in God's Kingdom?" So we might draw some parallels.

One talent, or two, five, or ten — what are we doing with them? Are we showing and sharing them? Are we making something of them? If so, we are on the right track. We might even end up with a lifetime of notable and dedicated service, based upon how we invest and use our talents. I like that idea — the idea of asking, "How can I use the blessings that God has entrusted to me for a larger purpose?"

We should probably keep in mind that the talents that Jesus spoke about had to do with money. A talent weight was a way of measuring money, whether silver or gold. Jesus does not specify if the talents in the parable were silver or gold — we do not know. But we still wonder what they are worth today. So, a talent of silver would be worth about \$16,500. A talent of gold, today, would be worth the equivalent of approximately \$1,400,116.57. So the matter that Jesus was talking about was not inconsiderable. Putting it to use was tremendously worthwhile. And the doubling of it by the servants with the five talents or the two talents was admirable. Just as the story says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Fortunately, our talents include our money, and every other blessing. Providentially, talent shows. Happily, people notice. In good time, people pay attention. People gain something from being with someone who shares their talents. Talent shows. I like to think of the talents that our Lord Jesus showed in the Gospels: a talent for identifying and putting promising people to work as disciples; a talent for speaking to large groups of people, and giving them inspiration and hope; a talent for caring for people who had been shunned and ignored by the rest of society; a talent for healing people who were hurting; a talent for knowing what is happening inside a person, and for drawing that out, and addressing it.

Yes, I like to think of the talents that our Lord Jesus showed in the Gospels: of helping people know that God loves them; of establishing goodness and grace; of providing a way to live and a way to live eternally; of giving beyond what would be normally expected, even unto death on the cross. Our multi-talented Lord shared what He had, and we are all the better for it.

Talent shows. Can we say that Jesus has set the example — that doing all we can, and more so, with our gifts and talents is the way of Jesus Christ? If we can incorporate that concept into our daily living, we will be happier and the world will be a happier place. I like what Nancy Rockwell says, "Love and faith, like money, require the taking of risks in order to grow" (*The Bite in the Apple*, 2014). God loves us just the way we are. And God loves us too much to let us stay the way we are.

“What talent do I have, really?” If you have found yourself asking that question, perhaps it would be good to reflect on the people who have been your companions on this journey of life — where you have listened with focused attention; where you have provided encouragement; where you have made something they enjoy; where you have shared a conversation that brightened their day; where you have traveled an uphill way with them, letting them know that you love them, and that God loves them. These are talents. They may not be the kind that end up in a typical talent show; they may not make you a household name. But they are winners, even so.

Talent shows. I am always in awe of people whose talents and gifts are different from my own — people who can play a piano or organ, for example. Especially an organ, when the hands and feet are doing at least four different things all at once. Not my talent. Not my gift. I would not know where to begin.

You have talents that the person next to you does not have, and vice versa. That is a good thing. Just as wonderful as great art by one particular artist might be — think how uniformly dull a gallery or museum would be, with only that one kind of art. God likes variety, and we are made in God’s image with all our varied talents. The key is to use them.

Now I would be remiss if I concluded the sermon without telling you that I do not know Miss Pittsburgh of 1952 personally. I do know and admire her gifts and talents, but somewhat from afar. She will be long remembered for starring on Broadway, in the movies, and on TV, in productions such as *Carousel*, *Oklahoma!*, and *The Music Man*. I say, I admire her somewhat from afar, because, while I do not know Shirley Jones personally, I do know you. And you are like her. I know that God has blessed you richly. You have many, many talents! Talent shows.

Sometimes, it may seem safer to live from day to day, hiding what God sends us, and keeping it locked away. Remember, these talents can never flourish if they are buried. May God make us bold enough to share. And may God’s blessings abound. Amen.