

**Integrity**  
**Sunday, July 25, 2021, 11:15 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Alfredo Feregrino**

To be honest with you, the parable that we just heard is a challenging passage to preach. So, I will do my best to convey the good news of this gospel and please bear with me.

In order to help illustrate the meaning of this parable, I would like to start my sermon with a short story.

Once upon a time in the Far East there was an Emperor who had no children and needed to choose a successor.

He called all the young people in the kingdom together one day. He said, "It has come time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor. I have decided to choose one of you." And he said: I am going to give each one of you a very special seed. Go home, plant it and come back in one year. Then I will judge the plants that you bring to me, and from there I will choose the next emperor of my kingdom!"

There was a boy named *Han* who received his seed and returned to his village.

His mother helped him to choose a pot a container and put some soil into it and he planted the seed and watered it carefully. Every day he would water it and watch to see if the seed had grown. But nothing happened. There were no signs of life in his pot for many months.

A year finally went by and all the youths of the kingdom brought their plants to the emperor for inspection.

*Han* told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But she encouraged him to go, and to take his pot, and to be honest about what happened.

Han and the other children entered the palace gates. By now, some of the plants were looking magnificent and the children were wondering which one the Emperor would choose.

The Emperor came out and started to make his way through the crowd, looking at the many impressive plants, trees and flowers that were on display.

Then the Emperor came to Han. He looked at the pot then looked at him.

"What happened here?" He asked.

"I watered the pot every day, but nothing ever grew." The Child said.

Then the emperor said to everybody, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds which could not grow.

All of you, except Han, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that your seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Han was the only one with the courage and integrity to bring me a pot with my seed in it.

Therefore, he is the one who will be the next emperor!"

And that is how the story ends.

So, Let me ask you a question...

What is integrity?

In the gospel that we heard today, we see how a noble man, travels to a distant country to obtain royal authority and before he leaves, he calls ten of his slaves and gives each of them one gold "mina" coin (which was the equivalent of three months wages in the Palestine of the 1<sup>st</sup> century).

Some scholars think that a historical event underlies the reference to a noble man going away to obtain royal authority.

Josephus a first century historian recounts how Archelaus son of Herod the Great, had to travel to Rome upon the death of his father to obtain the title of king. (Herod was the ruler of Judea who orders the Massacre of the Innocents at the time of the birth of Jesus).

Then a delegation of fifty Palestinians composed of both Jews and Samaritans were sent to oppose his kingship. And do you know what happened? ... at the end of this gospel, he killed them all. (Archelaus is also known to have killed/ slaughtered 3000 of his countrymen, so eventually the Romans deposed him because of his extreme cruelty).

So, this memorable historical event was well known to the audience of the gospel writer. So, enough of ancient history... let me go back to the parable.

So, upon his return this noble man having received royal authority, (basically becoming a king), settles matters with his slaves.

One slave has made 10 gold minas profit and so the king gives him 10 cities as a reward. The second slave made 5 gold minas profit and the king gives him 5 cities. But the third slave returns to this now king only the one gold mina coin that he received, wrapped in a piece of cloth.

You can only imagine the reaction of this king towards his slave.

Wow, did not you produced anything with the gold coin that I gave you? Lazy and wicked slave.

Yes, this slave has made no gains but he has also made no losses, but now he is a real problem in the eyes of his “king”. This slave did not produce any profit.

This illustrated who slaves were valued in those days ... They were only value according to the profit that they could bring to their masters.

Similar to the parable of the talents in the gospel of Matthew, if you pay attention you may see that on a deeper level this parable in the gospel of Luke is not a lesson in responsibility or stewardship but an illustration of greed and cruel revenge.

And it is interesting to note that this parable is not included in our 3 year lectionary for some strange reason.

To emphasizes the point, this noble man, went to seek a royal title and then expected others to multiply his profits without any effort from him.

And yes, most of us have grown-up with a capitalist worldview which makes accumulation and consumption of wealth a virtue and a goal.

The American dream (a fallacy we need to stop perpetuating) affirms that anyone who is motivated and ambitious can start from nothing and become amazingly wealthy.

And we know that this dream is by no means possible for every American. (because of racial and gender inequality and many other things. )

So, how can we interpret this parable, which contains such a surplus a meaning?  
I guess it will depend on the type of lens you use.

If we use a capitalist worldview, the capitalist lens, we would have no time for the lazy slave who was given one gold coin and made no profit at all. Right?

In our society making a profit and getting wealthy is the “ideal”.

Our assumptions force us to honor the two slaves whom with very little, multiplied their master's investment. So looking through this lens, these two slaves are the “heroes” and the examples to follow.

But there is a catch... In the Palestine of the first century where the resources were limited, one person's gain was often another person's loss.

So, the two servants who increased their master's wealth, would have been seen as taking advantage of others who cooperated and collaborated with their master, using fraudulent practices to enrich their king and themselves by taking the resources of others.

We can see a similar economic patterns active today in our world.

But the gospel is countercultural....Jesus wasn't preaching good news for capitalists. His audience, were mainly poor peasants, the outcast of society, people living on the margins. So, if we are interpreting this passage from the margins we see how the action of the third slave is good news.

The action of the third slave is based on integrity. And he is the only one who is really prepared to take the consequences and cost of his conviction by taking a risk.

Integrity, Integrity, Integrity.

The third slave is not wicked or lazy, except in the eyes of those who are greedy accumulators of wealth or those who are co-opted by them as are the first two slaves in the parable.

This third slave is the one who acted with courage, honor and integrity for refusing to participate in this dysfunctional system.

In his own way, he was confronting the oppressor.

This third slave is the one who acted with courage honor and integrity by refusing to be part of a system of abuse and exploitation.

And yes, for many of us, our reality is not so different from the reality of the Palestine of the 1st century.

In the first two decades of the twenty first century, inequality in the US soared to levels not seen since the Great Depression. We live in a world of growing economic inequality.

But let me make a point.

Jesus was not against having possessions nor was he against people having wealth on principle.

We know examples of many people with wealth (donors), people that give abundantly to science, medicine, culture and education, to our churches and ministries.

Jesus was against greed and those who "store up treasures for themselves" at the expense of others as in the parable of the Rich Fool few chapters before. (Luke 12: 13-21)

Same with the story of the young rich man in the gospel of Mark. Where Jesus tell this young rich man to sell his possessions and give them to the poor. Because the money of this young rich man was built on a lie, his money was built by defrauding and cheating others. (Mark 10:17-27).

So, Let me emphasize again, Jesus was not against possessions or against people with wealth, but rather, those who participated in a system of abuse and exploitation, enriching themselves at the expense of others.

And Yes,

This third slave is the one who acted with honor and integrity for refusing to participate in this unjust system of abuse and exploitation.

Integrity, Integrity, Integrity.

You know what?

Integrity is acting, talking and behaving in ways that honor yourself and others.

Integrity is examining things before you do them and doing only those things you know to be true and right.

In the end, it is an important piece of our spiritual growth and maturity.

So, I wonder,

Do you behave in ways that honor yourself and others?

I wonder,

Do you have the courage to do the right thing because it is right?

So invite you to be aware and pay attention.

Living with integrity and courage will bring clarity and direction to every part of your life. Acting with integrity and doing the right thing takes courage and sometimes there is risk involved. But trust that God will give you strength.

*Han* the child that in the story at the beginning, and the third slave in the parable acted with courage and integrity.

So, I invite you to take the risk and act with courage and integrity.

This is how we will become a source of God's light in the world.

**AMEN**