

# The Kingdom of God

Rev. Dr. Peter G.  
James

Luke 19:11-27

**Sermon Series: The  
Kingdom of God**

*“Why can’t  
the church just  
collect money  
the old  
fashioned  
way?”*

*- Wayne Albers*

The federated church in Chagrin Falls, Ohio is served by the Rev. Hamilton Throckmorton. I can’t quite believe his name—sounds like he ought to be the headmaster at a prep school. He based his September 16th sermon on a reading from Matthew 25—the so-called parable of the talents. It’s similar to the parable of the pounds (or minas) read a few moments ago. I suspect Jesus told different versions of the same story throughout his ministry. In both parables, a master gives his servants money to invest while he is gone. Upon his return, the master calls each servant to account for what he has done with the investment.

In the middle of his sermon, Rev. Throckmorton called forward the ushers to distribute envelopes to each adult, with crisp \$50 bills inside. Each child received an envelope with a \$10 dollar bill enclosed. He announced that the congregation had seven weeks to invest the money. On October 28th, they were asked to return and present the proceeds to mission.

Seventy-three-year-old Barbara Gates, sitting in her regular pew in the back, who had listened to sermons in this same church for 40 years, thought to herself, What kind of kooky idea is this? Accountant Wayne Albers whispered to his wife, “Sheer madness!

Why can’t the church just collect money the old fashioned way?” But in the center aisle, Ann Nagy thought about her ailing father and the song she had written to comfort him near death. “Give me your 50 dollars,” she said to her husband Scott. She knew exactly what she would do.

When I first heard about this story, I imagined the church as small for the minister to afford such a magnanimous gesture. It turns out this church has 1700 members. The \$40,000 was loaned to the pastor by several anonymous donors.

The congregation initially thought their pastor was over the top, pushing the envelope, so to speak. But soon the creative juices started flowing. One pilot offered rides in his private plane and raised \$700. One doctor used his \$50 to buy gas to travel back and forth to the hospital to take over shifts from the other doctors in his partnership, raising \$3000. One couple pooled their money with other families in the church, hired a harpist with the Cleveland Orchestra and held an elegant dinner party, raising \$1200. A young woman raised \$200 decorating flip flops. One woman sold homemade soup, a retired man sold wooden birdhouses. One nine-year-old made origami and raised \$68. Ann Nagy went together with several choir members to cut a CD on which she sang the song she

***He decides to play it safe rather than play at all.***

wrote in tribute to her dad. One man, who drove his 2006 Harley to church each Sunday, raised money by offering 12-mile bike rides through the surrounding countryside. His first customer was a woman in her mid-80s who now goes by the name “Harley Girl” in church.

Talents were multiplied on October 28th. People more than doubled the amount originally distributed, and the proceeds were given to three charities.

What Rev. Throckmorton did that day was to dramatize what God asks of us. Those 50 dollar bills could represent our lives. Jesus invites us to invest our whole selves in the kingdom of God.

Let’s return to the parable read at the outset of this sermon. Luke supplies two reasons in verse 11 why Jesus recites this specific parable at this particular time in his ministry. First, he is nearing Jerusalem. Second, the people expect the kingdom of God to immediately appear.

Jesus began his ministry by announcing the kingdom of God has come near. So, it’s only natural for his disciples to assume its consummation soon to follow, now that Jesus arrives at the holy city of Jerusalem. This will be the time when Jesus will liberate Israel from Roman tyranny.

In response, Jesus tells a parable about a nobleman who endeavors to expand his domain (17:12). He presents ten servants with a coin, which equates to four months worth of wages for a day

laborer. He instructs them to do business with them until his return (17:13).

The master returns and commends the first servant for using the coin to produce ten additional coins (17:16-17). He recognizes the second servant for investing the coin to make five more coins (17:18-19). But the whole point of the parable hinges on the third servant, who takes the master’s coin out of circulation (17:20-21). ‘Here Sir, is your coin. I kept it bright and shiny for you in a handkerchief in my bureau drawer. Because you see, I was afraid of you. I know you are a hard man. So, here is your money, in full and on time.’

The master seems to accept this servant’s assessment of himself. “If you knew I was a hard man, why didn’t you at least invest in a savings account with a 3.25 percent daily yield?” (17:24).

Let me refer you back to something told to us in verse 13. The master in this parable doesn’t demand his servants make money for him. Rather, he invites them to do business with him (17:13).

What would have happened if the servant had lost the master’s money by unwittingly investing in Enron stock? I suspect this master would have accepted the risks that go with the rewards. What galls this master is that his servant decides to be afraid of him rather than do business with him. He decides to play it safe rather than play at all.

What is particularly unsettling is what happens at the end of the parable. The master takes the coin

***Jesus invites us to annex our little kingdoms into the larger kingdom of God.***

from this timid servant and offers it to the servant who already has ten coins.

The bystanders in the story understandably protest (17:25). What are you doing offering a bonus to the guy who already has more than he knows what to do with?

Here's my take, from the vantage point of the master. You could have earned me a million dollars or lost it all trying, but instead you come crawling back to me—insinuating that I couldn't be trusted enough for you to take a risk, that I was some sort of legalistic type who goes only by the books. Those who invest in the kingdom of God become richer. Those who invest in the kingdoms of this world become poorer.

Last Sunday, we began a three-month series of sermons on the kingdom of God. Let me repeat what I said last week to drive the point home. Everybody has a kingdom—a realm that is uniquely our own. Having some say over something is precisely what makes it part of our realm or kingdom. For most of us, our kingdom is our home, school or place of employment. Jesus invites us to annex our little kingdoms into the larger kingdom of God.

Some people imagine the kingdom of God as someplace you go after you die. But nearly every time Jesus talks about the kingdom of God, he speaks of its nearness. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God has come near," (Mark 1:15).

The kingdom of God is not strictly something political or

geographical. Although the kingdom of God is not of this world, Jesus said it is for this world. The kingdom of God is not only something we wait for, it's something we work for.

There are two types of servants in this parable. The first kind invests his master's money, while the second kind hoards the master's stuff. The parable begs an answer. Which kind of servant are you?

Some of us are like the servant who takes what the master gives him and keeps it under wraps. We are afraid what we have will be taken from us, so we hide it. But some things in life are gained only by being given away and are lost by being hoarded. It's called the "use or lose" philosophy. If you don't use your brain, your mental prowess diminishes. Ask those who work with senior citizens. If you don't exercise your muscles, your body atrophies. Ask a physical trainer. In many companies, if you don't use your allotment of vacation time, you lose it.

The third servant in the parable is afraid of his master, regarding him as a hard man. The opposite of faith is not unbelief. The antonym of faith is fear. Fear is what keeps people from God. I am reminded of something Kevin Spacey said in the role of Verbal Kint, an enigmatic criminal in the movie *The Usual Suspects*: "I don't believe in God, but I am afraid of him."

Some of us are afraid of God. We are afraid of what he might ask of us or demand from us.

You want to know the real obstacle? Some of us don't want to

***We may pray  
“thy kingdom  
come, thy will  
be done,” but  
what we are  
really  
muttering  
under our  
breath is “my  
kingdom  
come, my will  
be done.”***

relinquish control to anyone, not even to God. We want to be the boss. We resist turning the keys over to someone else. We may pray “thy kingdom come, thy will be done,” but what we are really muttering under our breath is “my kingdom come, my will be done.”

In 1717, King Louis XIV of France died. He preferred to be called “Louis the Great.” He was the monarch who declared “I am the state.” His court was the most magnificent in Europe and his funeral spectacular. In the church where the funeral was performed, his body lay in a golden coffin. To dramatize his greatness, orders had been given that the cathedral would be dimly lit with only one special candle that was to be set above the coffin. The thousands of people in attendance waited in silence. Then Bishop Massillon began to speak. Slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, “Only God is great.”

Someday we will find discover only God is great.

Yesterday, I happened to be reading in Acts about two people named Ananias and Sapphira. This couple makes a pretense of turning over the keys of their lives to God, yet keeps an extra set handy just in case they need take control again at some point in the future.

Some of us, as we heard in the Minute for Witness, have one foot in each of two kingdoms. We have one foot in the kingdom of God and the other in the heavily fortified kingdom of the self. You can’t play baseball or softball with one foot in the batter’s box and the

other foot outside of it. You’ve got to put both feet in the batter’s box. Jesus invites you today to place both feet in the kingdom of God.

