

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

I hope by the end of this sermon you will have a good idea of what a calling from God looks like.

Today's Gospel could have been written just for us Kiwis. For kiwis are birds that had the talent to fly. Indeed, they once used to soar amidst the heavens and look down on the wetas and the tuatara and others of God's creatures crawling about in the mud. God gave the kiwi wings with which to fly. But flying was a risky business ... you know the wind and the other birds and then there was the landing, always the fear of hurting yourself when you land. So, the kiwi took the easy no-risk approach of walking around the ground. But now her wings have wasted away, and the kiwi lives in constant fear of the rats and possums.

What are you like at taking risks? Most of us have an inbuilt fear of failure that can stop us from taking risks.

The first two servants "went off at once" to multiply their gift (verses 16-17). They trusted in their relationship with the master. They were future-focused, willing to risk all for the master's increase. In contrast, the one-talent servant fearfully focused on the past. "I knew you were a harsh man ... so I was afraid." He did not trust that his relationship with the master could risk failure. He did not trust his own abilities. His fear immobilized him and led him to hide the gift until the master's return.

It was after all a huge amount that the master had entrusted the servants with. One talent was around 6,000 denarii. The first servant was given 30,000 denarii or about 5 million dollars in today's money.

We too have been given a great deal. God has given us all our own particular set of talents. Some of us are caring, some of us are good with money, others of us have the gift of doing practical tasks. Whatever your gift, God has given it to you to be used, not buried for fear of what others might think.

If you are involved in business at the moment, you will know how investors have become "risk averse" which means that the danger of losing the investment overcomes any other consideration. Today's Gospel has the master rewarding those that took a risk with their talents. It's all too easy to bury our talents because of fear. Without risk takers the Gospel would never have come to this land. Without taking a risk, the Church of God will never prosper, and neither will we.

One writer put it like this:

*This nation was built by people who took risks - pioneers who were not afraid of the wilderness, business leaders who were not afraid of failure, scientists who were not afraid*

*of the truth, thinkers who were not afraid of progress, dreamers who were not afraid of action.*

God is a risk-taking God, just look at the type of people He calls. Moses was a murderer, Miriam was a gossip, Abraham was too old, David was too young and couldn't keep his loincloth on. Mary was too young, and the other Mary was lazy. Noah got drunk and Elijah was burnt out. Jeremiah was too young and suffered from depression, Martha had a need to be needed and the list goes on. God has taken the biggest risk of all and called you and me.

We can find lots of encouragements to take risks in the wisdom of others:

*One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.* André Gide

*Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.* James Bryant Conant

*Courage is tiny pieces of fear all glued together.* Irisa Hail

*God doesn't always call the equipped but will always equip the called.*

But I have no talents I hear you say, not like other people do. A way of discerning your talent is to ask yourself what gives you joy? What is it that you delight in doing? Joy is God's way of guiding you to find your talent. When your joy meets a need in the world you have yourself a calling. Let me give you an example.

Jim is a granddad. Because both of his granddaughter's parents work, he often must take her to the hospital for blood tests and the like. It's really hard to get blood out of kids when they start to fear the needle. "What the hospital needs is something to distract the children," he thought to himself. Jim is also a model railway enthusiast. "What would it be like to build a simple Thomas train set around the walls of the children's ward to entertain the children?" He asked the hospital. They couldn't have been more delighted. Today when he takes his granddaughter to hospital, it's not to have a blood test, rather it is to see Thomas.

Jim took his delight, his talent and linked it to a need in the world. And that's what a calling from God looks like.

There was once a village chief who had three sons – each one had a special talent. The oldest cared for the olive trees, providing the village olive oil for food and trade. The second son was a shepherd, keeping the herds in good health, providing food and clothing for the village. The third son was a dancer, bringing cheer, beauty, and joy to the village.

One day, the chief had to go on a long journey and left the village in his sons' care. For a while, things went well, but then the cold winds began to blow. The olive branches, cracked from the ice, failed to bloom. Soon the villagers had no fuel, and they begged the first son to cut down the trees. He finally relented, for he knew it was foolish to save the trees only to lose the village.

The ice made it impossible to travel, and soon the villagers had nothing to eat. They begged the second son to kill the sheep so they wouldn't starve. At first, he refused but he finally realized it was foolish to save the sheep only to have the people perish.

The villagers had just enough food and fuel to survive, but the hardships broke their spirits. They lost hope and became desperate. One by one they left the village in search of a better home. The chief finally returned to find smoke from his own chimney alone. Troubled, he rushed into the house, surprising his sons. "What has become of the trees? Where are the sheep? And what has happened to the people?"

The first two sons with sorrow explained what had happened to the trees and the sheep. The father consoled them, "You did your best to save the village. But what has become of the people?"

The third son spoke up. "It hardly seemed proper to dance during such suffering. And besides, I wanted to conserve my strength to welcome you." "Then dance, my son," the father said, "for my village and my heart is empty."

But as the third son went to get up, he grimaced and fell. His legs were so stiff from sitting that they were no longer fit for dancing. The father, filled more with sadness than anger said, "Our village could survive with little food and fuel; but it could not survive without hope." And they wept.

What talent are you called to share for the sake of Jesus?