



Thirty-third Sunday Ordinary Time 2005

Proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31 1Thess 5:1-6 Matthew 25: 14-20

This week we have another parable, this time about money. We also have some verses taken from the last chapter of Proverbs where the ideal wife is described. It is a long poem called *The Oracle of King Lemuel's mother about Women*. The poem is really a mother-in-law's description of the only wife suitable for her boy.

We will look at the parable first and then return to the poem.

You will have noticed that several parables have the same sort of beginning. They start with a king or leader going off and leaving some people to get on with their job or managing or minding. For the early Christians these stories were told to help them learn about the right attitudes for disciples managing on their own without the physical presence of Jesus. These stories are also part of our formation as disciples.

The Journeyer in this story is very wealthy. He has a huge fortune, which he wants managed while he is away. He takes the unusual step of dividing it up between three managers whom he considers capable of dealing with the money. To one he gives \$5m, another \$2m, and to the last \$1m.

The three brokers go off to work with the money. The first doubles his amount. The second also doubles his amount while the third develops cold feet and ends up burying the money for safety. In those days if buried money was lost the person who did the burying could not be held responsible for the loss.

Now comes the reckoning.

The first two managers are given great praise and new responsibilities. They are rewarded equally because each used what they were given to the best of their ability.

The third character, who puts his energies into self-protection, hedges his bets. He loses out because of over caution. He returns the money intact, but as the owner complains, "In the bank it would at least have gained some interest."

In reflecting on this story we learn that if we accept the role of disciple we will be accountable for how we use our talents in the service of God. It's not about having lots of resources but using what we have in a way that makes present in our world the love, justice, mercy, and generosity of God.

What about accountability?

The third man was consumed by the thought that he would bring down an adverse judgement on himself and so was too paralysed to take a risk. It would have been

quite a good touch to have a character who lost the lot, he probably would have received a better reception.

Remember Jesus once said, "Would that you had been hot or cold..." Jesus does not need companions who are so afraid of a future judgement that they do nothing. It would be a pity if we spent our lives proclaiming the love of God and failed to believe in God's merciful love for ourselves.

If we recall the picture of the ideal wife in relation to this parable, and recall the use of the image of spouse for the chosen people then we can read this poem as a type of perfect disciple.

The disciple is diligent, skilled, loving, protective and enterprising. In this context verse 11 is particularly beautiful.

God has entrusted his heart to us.

We are not merely dutiful servants but holders of the divine heart. The disciple's heart is really the heart of God.

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