

Our parable of the three servants today is a story about the interplay between fear and the way we live our lives, the question of whether we invest in others or fearfully hide and bury our talents. It's a good question to ask ourselves now as we face rising numbers of COVID cases in the pandemic and the uncertainty we have in our nation in the aftermath of the election. As usual, the Bible calls us out of our places of fear, something along the lines of we have nothing to fear, but fear itself. I would add also spiders, my children completely agree with me on that one. But certainly, we do need to distinguish between healthy fear and that paralyzing unhealthy fear, seek ways out of our unhealthy fears, the ones that grip and paralyze us.

I saw a meme on this topic the past week to offer encouragement around overcoming fear. He wrote, "I have a fear of elevators, but I'm taking steps to avoid it." Truly though, the reminder we have in scripture is that there are steps we can take to avoid the pitfalls of fear and embrace a life rooted in God and God's call in our lives. In today's parable, we read of three servants, two of whom are given talents that they invest and double their return, while a third servant chooses to hide and bury his talent in the ground, because as the servant states he was "afraid". As a result, the servant loses even what literally had.

One way understand this parable is to think of the talents as all that we have been given as people. Notice, we have the choice, whether we share and give and invest those talents in others, or keep what we have to ourselves, bury them away due to our fears. The outcome of not investing our talents, what we've been given, is that we can find ourselves empty handed and even empty hearted. Right now in our society, we are being pulled in different directions. Each of us have a choice, whether to share and invest our talents, that which we have, to share and invest them in others and for the sake of others, or to cut ourselves off from others and keep and hide our talents.

When fear is our driver as is for that third servant in the story, we are much more likely to cease giving and investing in other people. Certainly fear is running high these days because we are facing crises on multiple levels. Still, there is reason to hope.

When we look to our own history as Americans, we know we have historically been people who come together and invest in each other for the common good in times of crisis. Certainly we see that in our veterans, the sacrifices they have made. But I also think about average Americans and the way that Americans came together at different times in our history, like following 9/11 or our response during World War II when Americans here at home made great sacrifices for the common good through things like rationing, rationing of foods like meats, butter, sugar, canned milk, and even gasoline to support the war effort.

Americans also conserved water and began dressing more warmly to preserve oil and fuel. Scrap drives began throughout America and people donated rags, rubber, paper, and metal. More Americans became trained as nurses to aid the wounded and Americans bought and invested in war bonds. When I read about these historical efforts and the sacrifices, I feel inspired. I think it inspires all of us because we know that this widespread investment in the common good ultimately led to victory. The return on our investment, our talents as Americans more than doubled and many lives were saved because of it.

But Christians have been at this kind of work for even longer. The church has invested in others in incredibly self-sacrificing ways for over 2,000 years always following the example of Jesus. Looking at history, we read about the Plague of Cyprian in the 3rd century and how Christians at that time refused to let fear guide them and their ministry to the ill and dying, but took to their communities, to "take charge of the sick". Their self giving example was so powerful that it was recorded in the history books and greatly increased the spread of the Christian faith throughout the Roman world.

In 1527, during the Bubonic Plague, Martin Luther encouraged Christians in their ministry, writing a letter to say that the challenges of the plague "does not dissolve our duties, it turns them to crosses on which we must be prepared to die". The church, again, rose to the occasion to tend to the sick, investing their lives and gospel values for the sake of others. There's so many other examples, but Christians have at many times in history been

challenged by crises and understood those crises to be opportunities to give more fully of themselves sacrificially for the sake of Christ.

During World War II, the sacrifices made by many Christians in Germany became known as the efforts of the confessing churches. These were Christians who opposed the attempt to bring the church under a single pro-Nazi organization under Hitler. Christians like Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer led this resistance in Europe and many Christians resisted at great sacrifice to themselves. Some being placed in concentration camps while others like Bonhoeffer were eventually executed. These are profound examples of sharing one's talents, but even small acts of giving, of investing our talents can reap great rewards.

As I re-read our parable this week, I was reminded of a story from Dr. Edith Eger's book about the Holocaust. One particular event came to mind that seemed to exemplify this parable. It was when Edith arrived in Auschwitz and was forced to dance for Josef Mengele. She danced beautifully using her talents as a trained ballerina. So as a reward, she was thrown a loaf of bread. She grabbed the bread. But instead of hiding that bread and keeping it to herself, which would have been completely understandable given the fear they all had of starving, she instead took that loaf of bread back to her bunk and shared it with all her bunkmates. The investment she made that day was repaid a few years later when during the death march, as she grew close to death and fell to the ground, like so many who fell and died during that march, she was suddenly held back to her feet and assisted by one of her former bunk mates who remembered Edi's kindness. She said to Edi, "You shared your bread." That sharing, that investment, didn't just double. It saved her life.

My friends, we are surrounded by fear. Fear is understandable, but it is not and should not inhibit our ability to give and to share. We may be tempted to totally withdraw from others in this conflicted time, to take what we have and hide away, to cease to invest in others, especially those with whom we disagree. But as followers of Jesus, we are called always out of our unhealthy fear, out of all consuming fear, knowing that crises invite us to share

and bear our crosses like they have in every age. God has given each of us something that needs sharing with the world. So invest in love. Invest in peace. Invest in justice. Invest in service. Invest in generosity. Invest in others and see what God will do to multiply it. Amen.