

July 16, 2017
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55:10
Psalm 65:10, 11, 12-13, 14
Romans 8:18-23
Matthew 13:1-23

The disciples approached Jesus and said, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He said to them in reply, ‘because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away.’”

You may recall that in the past we have stated that some of the teachings of Jesus can be a little hard to comprehend. Well, may I suggest this is one of those passages? “To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

Reading this passage of Scripture could certainly cause one to stop and ponder. It seems rather unfair, Jesus appears to be saying that those who have much will get more while those who have little, theirs will be taken away from them.

At first glance this passage really does seem a bit inequitable. However, parables are specifically designed to make one stop and think. Subsequently, there must be more to this statement than immediately meets the eye.

I suppose if Jesus were giving a speech concerning stock market investing to a Bloomberg stockbroker’s audience we might think differently regarding His analysis, but Jesus was not talking about

the stock market or the accumulation of worldly goods; no, He was talking about investing in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Much bigger, more profitable, and a whole lot more stable than the Wall Street Stock Market the Kingdom of Heaven includes the entirety of creation, the whole cosmos, including the sun, moon and stars, earth and every creature breathing and not breathing, all of which in earnest wait and yearn for the added dividends expected in light of redemption.

Here the question posed to us is, will we invest our futures in the earthly stock markets, or will we invest in the Kingdom of Heaven? Will we look for temporary dividends to be paid out here on earth, or will we invest in more secure commodities where neither moth nor rust doth eat?

I like this simple stock market comparison, because it provides a contemporary reference to what I believe sums up at least part of Jesus' mission here on earth. Plus, people can identify with the stock market with all of its fluctuations, risks, trials, and tribulations. Hopefully we can see the comparison in regards to investing wisely in the Kingdom of God.

The fact of the matter is that heavenly dividends will be rewarded to those who while still living here on earth invest their God given gifts wisely. Jesus wants each of us to have a successful spiritual portfolio when we finally retire to our eternal heavenly home.

Needless to say, whatever Heaven will be like, and whatever we will be doing, and at this point no one really knows for sure, all I know is that Heaven is going to be absolutely wonderful, and Jesus wants each of us to be well invested in heavenly stocks and bonds.

Written for the ears of an ancient Jewish audience, the Gospel reading for today describes four types of soil, all four types of soil destined to receive a portion of seed from a lavish sower.

You will notice that the seeds seem to land everywhere, on the good soil, in the road, on the rocks, and some even landed amongst the bramble bushes. At first glance one would think the farmer was an inexperienced sower with seeds flying everywhere. But not so, on the contrary the notion of lavish here means that he was actually very generous in casting out His seed.

"A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear" (Matt. 13:3b-9).

Taking a measure of literary liberty with this passage, we could imagine a successful financial advisor willing to share an investment opportunity guaranteed to pay back rich dividends. Subsequently, he went to all the local people and told them about this wonderful opportunity that would surely produce great rewards.

Indeed, eventually there was a very large group of people who heard the message, but for the most part the investment strategy fell on deaf ears. They listened to the opportunity but their real focus in life was on other things. In a nutshell, they didn't have

time to invest in any future prospects, -for them present day difficulties, and pleasures were enough to think about.

Another group liked the idea of investing, and quickly bought into the plan; however, their investment thinking was pretty shallow, their hearts were focused on all the benefits they would reap, and they did little to change their investment strategy. Thus, when life got tough and the financial climates changed, they couldn't or wouldn't submit to the necessary disciplines - subsequently they simply abandoned their initial investments and gave up on the whole idea.

The third group of people was like the second group. They too bought into the plan quickly. One might say they were "gung ho" to get started. Thinking about all of the future dividends, they were red-hot prospects for the advisor until their self-centered desires began to grow like thorns and weeds.

You see no one ever told them that you can easily take the person out of the weed patch but it takes some work to pull the weeds from the soils of the heart. So over time and without the necessary spiritual disciplines to guide them, their carnal desires began to grow, which unfortunately they do quite naturally, and they literally choked out any remaining investment strategy disciplines.

Well as you might imagine the last group of people were the ones who heard the investment strategy plan and really took it to heart. They not only believed in the security of the financial advisor and his message but they understood that they needed not only to believe in the investment strategies, but in addition, they needed to daily practice the investment principles, and as a result they

reaped amazing dividends in the future, and for some even as much as a hundred fold.

I hope the investment analogy makes this parable a little more understandable? Few of us are farmers who make a living sowing seed. Yet we still have the question to answer as to why those who have - get more and those with little loose what they have.

What exactly did Jesus mean by this statement. Well for certain at this point we are indeed still subject to speculation, but hopefully the last financial investment analogy helps - but we still have other options to consider. So lets turn to the OT readings for some additional insight.

In our first OT reading Isaiah described the natural order of God's justice and provision for not just a selected few but for the whole earth. Rain and snow come down everywhere watering the ground, which results in grain and bread for everyone who sows and eats.

In addition, the message promises that God's Word will go out and it will not return void. Therefore we might conclude that what is included in God's natural order will happen - not only in the natural events of the earth, but also in the spiritual realms as well. In a nutshell, God's grace is offered to everyone.

In addition, the Psalm for today also emphasizes the fact that it is God's mercy that brings forth the rains that soften the ground, which eventually brings forth a bountiful harvest. Again, it is the hand of God that brings forth the plentiful harvest.

Turning back to the NT St. Paul reminds us in the second reading that even though for the time being we may go through periods of trial and suffering - in the future all of creation will reap the benefits of God's redemption. Here once again we see that it is the hand of God who brings all eternal promises to pass.

So then back to our question, why do those who have get more and those with little loose what they have? Well for starters, have you ever heard the idiom, "a fool and his money are soon parted?" The same principle seems to apply in this parable. The natural man will think of the different soils and conclude, they are what they are and they cannot change. Seed simply cannot take root on a hard footpath etc.

But Jesus was not talking about soil conditions; He was talking about the condition of the human heart. Grace has been given and will be given to all, but not all will respond in the same way. Unlike the different soil conditions, human hearts do have the capacity to change, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

You see, repentance is the key to realizing future Heavenly Securities. In the same way that one has to habitually invest and save money to grow a successful retirement portfolio, one has to invest the grace God gives them into the Kingdom of Heaven in order to secure an increased return.

Last week we learned that Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for yourselves." Now that's an interesting dividend isn't it - rest for yourselves. Now what about the peace that passes all

understanding, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All of these spiritual dividends can be ours if we are willing to trust the Lord.

And by willing, I mean let go and let God. To make future retirement gains one must be willing to risk their personal resources - for a season - in order to realize a long term gain later. In the same manner we need to let go and let God and follow His plan for salvation. Jesus taught, blessed are the eyes that see, the ears that hear, and the hearts that are repentant, soft and humbled ready to receive God's grace. They shall receive their rewards in due time.

So then in closing and on a practical level what can we do to enhance our kingdom wealth? Indeed, this question is asked by nearly everyone who initially wants to invest in the Kingdom of Heaven, but only a small group will follow the guaranteed investment tips provided by Jesus. You see, the answer defies the natural condition of the human soul, as well as all natural logic concerning investing.

When we normally think of investing we think of banking, keeping, and saving. In other word's, what's been given to me I must put it in the bank, in the market or some investment or another to reserve it for a later rainy day, or store it away for my retirement nest egg. This concept fits quite well with the natural human condition of self-preservation, but this methodology will never work under God's laws of sowing and reaping.

Here we learn that Kingdom principles demand that one must give and not try to hold on, hoard, or save. It really is quite simple; by giving more, more comes back to us. So then, whatever God has given to you, whether it is a talent, time, money, and or wealth

give it back to Him. The more you give the more He promises to give back.

It's never too late to start investing for the future. Begin today by acknowledging and receiving God's mercy and grace. Know that He loves you and that He has already made a most generous deposit in your heavenly bank account. Scripture states, "For God so loved the world that He gave." Therefore, we are to go and do likewise. Let the Holy Spirit guide you as to when and how.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.