

BUILDING BLOCKS: GIFTS AND TALENTS

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

May 7, 2023

: Matthew 25:14-30, I Cor. 12, I Peter 4:10-11

I have with me today Greg's toolbox. Now I must admit this is just a sampling of the tools that he has. I really believe that one of the things Greg loves to collect are tools! I guess it is kind of like I have a big collection of cookbooks. Anyway, Greg loves it when he finds a good tool on sale! He'll come home and say, "Look at this! I got a good deal on this box of drill bits" for example. And I'll think – why do you need so many? And of course – each one has a different purpose – and can be used for different things. It is important to have the right tool for whatever job you have – and to use them!

It reminds me of a story I read this week of a man who had a construction business. The man had to go away on a long trip and so he called his three employees together and said, "I have to go on a long trip and so I am leaving you three in charge. I have put together a toolbox for each of you to use to keep the business going while I am gone."

The man then gave each of his employees a toolbox. The toolboxes contained all the tools the employees needed to do what the man expected of them -- but since the three employees didn't all have the same abilities, each toolbox was different. To the first employee, he gave a very large toolbox filled with every tool that you can imagine. To the second employee, he gave a smaller toolbox, but one that still had a very good assortment of tools. To the third employee, he gave a very small toolbox, with just a few tools, but enough tools for the employee to do what was expected of him.

The man then left to go on his trip. When he returned, he called his employees together to see what they had done while he was gone. The first employee said, "I knew that you had a great love for the homeless people of the world, so I used the toolbox that you gave me to build homes for the homeless.

"That is great!" said the employer. "You have done so well that I am going to put you in charge of all-new construction for the entire company."

The second employee said, "I knew that you had a great love for the elderly, so I used the toolbox you gave me to fix up the homes of elderly people who can no longer do the work themselves." "That is wonderful!" said the employer. "You have done such a good job, that I am putting you in charge of all the repair and maintenance work for the entire company."

Then he turned to the third employee and asked, "What did you do with the tools that I left for you?" "I knew that you are a very demanding boss and that you expect a lot from your employees. I was afraid that if I used the tools you gave me that one of them might get broken or that I might lose one of them and make you angry. So, I put the tools in a very safe place. They were there all the time you were gone. Look, here they are, just like new."

"What a worthless employee you are! I didn't give you the tools for safekeeping, I gave them to you to use in my business. You are fired!" He then took the man's toolbox – and divided the tools between the other two employees, since they had proven that they would make good use of them.¹

Now this story may sound familiar – and it should because it is an adaptation of the Parable of the Talents – our Scripture for today from Matthew 25:14-30. Turn with me to that passage in your Bible – and I will read it – as it came from the words of Jesus.

Here begins the reading: ¹⁴“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. ¹⁵He gave five bags of silver^[a] to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip. ¹⁶“The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. ¹⁷The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. ¹⁸But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money. ¹⁹“After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. ²⁰The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’ ²¹“The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together.’ ²²“The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.’ ²³“The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!’ ²⁴“Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. ²⁵I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’ ²⁶“But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, ²⁷why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’ ²⁸“Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. ²⁹To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. ³⁰Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

There are three areas of our lives to which this text draws attention – money, gifts and time. And we need all three for building blocks for a healthy church.

First, as noted in verse 14, refers to the money or treasures that the master entrusted to the three servants. Note that the master didn't GIVE these resources to them - but rather he entrusted these things into their care. They still all belonged to the Master. We won't be focusing on the stewardship of our financial gifts today – but it is an important building block that God has given us to build a healthy church.

A second building block is seen in verse 15, the master divided these gifts in proportion to their talents and abilities. The master knew what each person was able to do.

First, know that everyone who has given their life to Christ has been given a spiritual gift. As it says in I Peter 4:10-11_ *“God has given each of you a gift from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another...then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.”* Each one of us has been blessed with a gift. We are told to use our gifts to serve one another and give glory to God. In our parable, the first two servants used their gifts to make more – and were praised, “Well done good and faithful servant! You were faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” But to the one who did nothing – he was reprimanded and told that his money would be taken away from him and given to the one with 10 talents.

Jesus is saying, with respect to our gifts and abilities: “Use them or lose them.” Use them and you’ll receive more. Waste them and what you have will be taken away.” To bury one’s talents is a grave mistake!

I think this story is a good picture of what God does in us. He has given each of us tools to use in building His kingdom. We don't all have the same tools, but God expects us to use whatever tools He has given to us. It really doesn't matter what the gift is or how many gifts you have – the real issue is whether you are using your gifts.

God wants us to be faithful in using the gifts we have been given to help others and to build up the kingdom.

The Church is like God’s toolbox. God has a lot of jobs to do and He has given the people in His Church different gifts and talents to help Him to do those jobs. We are His tools! To some he has given musical talent to help lead others in worship. To some He has given the talent of teaching so that they can help others to learn more about Him. There is not one person in the church that can do everything, is there? Listen to what the Bible says, *“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.”* (I Corinthians 12:4-7)

Each and everyone’s gifts are important for the church to grow. Every single one of us has something to offer! And we can’t compare ourselves – criticizing others or thinking our gift isn’t as good as another OR believe that our gift isn’t needed. We can’t just sit in the pew and do nothing with our gifts. We are called to USE our gifts – and appreciate ALL the gifts that God has placed in our church family.

Going back to the tools we began the message with – hear this story as we think about how we are used as tools of God for the church.

Some tools lived together in a carpenter's shop. At first, they were glad just to have been selected by the Carpenter. There were other tools that the Carpenter could have chosen, and the tools were pleased that he, a Master Craftsman, had picked them.

But they quickly forgot their initial joy and began to focus on each other. With this, they began to be bothered by and irritated with each other. One by one, each tool began to dwell on the shortcomings and faults of the other tools. No one was exempt from the critical and demeaning evaluation of the others.

The Hammer spoke first, for he served as the chairman. "Brother Drill," he began, "you and your family are so noisy. And you seem to spin in circles, but go nowhere."

The Drill quickly spoke up. "It's true that I go around in circles, and my work makes noise. But at least I'm sharp. Pencil is small and often so dull that he makes a bad impression. He needs to be sharpened a bit if he expects to be of any use around here."

Pencil felt defensive and spoke up. "Yes," he began, "I am a little blunt at times, But it's because I work hard at my job. At least I'm not rough like Sandpaper here. It seems all he does is rub things the wrong way!"

That remark made Sandpaper really angry. "Hey, what about Ruler here? He measures others by his standards, as though he is the only one right around here."

Ruler surveyed the group and said, "I'll go if I have too, but then so must the Screwdriver. He's so annoying, always tightening here and loosening there." The screwdriver angrily spat out, "Fine with me! I'll go, but Pliers has to go too! He is always putting pressure on others!" he said.

To this, Pliers answered, "Well, what about the saw? "Saw's cuts hurt. All she does is separate and divide...instead of unify." Saw rose up to answer these accusations when suddenly a noise at the door stopped all conversation.

The Carpenter walked in, ready to begin the day's work. He put on His tool belt and stepped to the workbench. He picked up the pencil and ruler. Carefully he measured and marked the wood before him. He sawed along the marks and then planed the cut edges of the wood to smooth the rough edges. He hammered joints into place and drilled holes for screws to make the piece sturdy. Then he sandpapered the wood to a silky smoothness. All day long He worked, using first one tool and then another. He had a special project to complete, and he saw the value and potential in every one of the tools He used. The Master Craftsman was aware of each tool's limitations and shortcomings, but he focused on what they could do... what they could accomplish.

He didn't try to use the Pencil like the Hammer, nor did He try to use the Screwdriver like the Sandpaper. He used each one skillfully and proficiently, according to its perfect design.

As he held and used all the tools, they no longer focused on the shortcomings of the others. Rather, they saw the value that each of them possessed and saw how each one was needed to complete the Master's project. They now realized that it took several tools with unique strengths to do the job well.

Finally, at the end of the day, the Carpenter blew the dust from the finished product and admired it. "Beautiful!" he said, "I couldn't have done it without my tools. Each one had an important role to play. No one tool could have done all the jobs. They're all, each one important."²

You and I are all important in God's toolbox! We have an important role to play in the building of His church.

What will be your response to the Master Carpenter's call on your life?

PRAYER & INVITATION

RESOURCES

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¹"The Three Tooboxes", http://sermons4kids.com/three_toolboxes.htm

²<https://tonycooke.org/stories-and-illustrations/tension-toolbox/> and

<https://ssnet.org/blog/inside-story-carpenters-tools-allegory/>