

Gospel reading for Sunday 24th November 2019

[Luke 19:11-27](#)

The parable of the gold coins (ten minas)

As mentioned in an earlier edition, we have been jumping around a bit with the readings sequence in recent weeks. For the final lectionary reading of the church year, we return to this passage, which in Luke's Gospel, fits in between two key stories. It follows immediately after the Zacchaeus account and is the last recorded event before Jesus makes His final entry into Jerusalem.

But first some contextual and cultural background ...

[It seems Jesus used a historical incident that would have happened when He was a boy, as the basis for this parable: *'The historical background for the parable was the visit of Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, to Rome to secure permission to reign as a so-called client king, i.e. over a territory actually subject to Rome. This petition was opposed by a delegation of Archelaus' own subjects.'* (Expositor's Bible Commentary.) Therefore, the people listening to this story would have had a very real picture in their minds of what Jesus was describing.]

Note that there is also a similar and possibly more familiar story in Matthew's Gospel but probably different enough to suggest that it is not just another Gospel writer's account of the same parable. (See [Matthew 25:14-30](#)). I mention that because in Matthew, the parable is (unfortunately) given the name of the *Parable of the talents*. Unfortunate because the link with the word talents has probably been largely responsible over the years, for sending many people down an interpretation pathway that is totally up the creek! (A talent was actually a monetary unit equivalent to approximately 33 Kg of silver – which would have been a massive amount of money. Just for the record, there are 60 minas in one talent.)

A common message derived from this story at a simple level is ... God has given us a wide range of talents. We need to use them or lose them. That's OK if we are operating under an image of a task-master God, where we are conned into believing that we can earn points by using our talents and "**doing stuff**", but it is likely that this is quite a bit off the track from what Jesus had in mind. Besides ... that's not the God we know.

So this story is not about talents or wise use of mina, gold coins, money, possessions or assets. If we substitute THE GOSPEL for the minas (or talents), that puts us in a good place to see this story from a different perspective. Coming immediately on the back of the Zacchaeus acted parable, that line of thinking seems to fit. (See the opening verse ... *'While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable ...'*

Everyone has been given the Gospel. The question is what have we done with that? Have we accepted it? Have we taken it on board and been entrepreneurial with our opportunity? Have we taken the information that we have about Jesus and used it in our family and in our community in such a way that it has brought substantial return? Or have we despite having the Gospel placed before us and available to us, done nothing with it, let it sit there, even buried it away out of sight and in effect rejected it? It is like the scenario of throwing opening the doors of a maximum security prison to allow all prisoners to freely walk away. Rejecting the good news of being set free by the Gospel is analogous to choosing to stay in prison and not take up the get out of jail free opportunity. The key point that Jesus was trying to make was not about financial due diligence, but rather about the significance of simply saying YES or NO to the Gospel.

As we in Lutheran schools wait for the King to return, how effective are we being with the Gospel? That may seem to be a reasonable question ... but in some ways it is also a dangerous question. On no account should we read into it any fear of punishment, judgement or rejection because we already know that we have inherited the kingdom ... and what an inheritance that is! Nevertheless, we have work to do ... to spread the good news that Jesus has set everyone free!

Having said all that, we could do worse than make the link to using our gifts and talents. It is often the people behind the scenes who quietly 'show people Jesus' by simply going about their work in dedicated service, using what they may see as their humble talents to simply BE the Gospel in action.

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