

Scripture:

Matthew 25:14-30

“Nurture and exercise.”

Many of us are likely familiar with the expression ----- use it ----- or lose it.

Use it --- or lose it.

We'll our gospel passage today ----- is kind of about ----- use it --- or lose it.

Use it and grow it.

Or ---- don't use it --- don't exercise it ---- and watch it fade away --- lose it.

Don't use your emergency brake in the car and one day when you do go to use it --- the cable will simply snap --- and it's useless --- use it or lose it.

Practice speaking that second or third or fourth --- language that you speak -- --- or you will eventually lose the ability to speak it --- use it or lose it.

Practice your golf swing ---- or you will eventually lose it.

Practice playing that instrument ----- the piano --- guitar ---- your voice whatever it is --- practice --- use it ---- or you will eventually lose the ability to play.

Use it or lose it.

Nurture and exercise it ----- don't just hold on to it --- and try to preserve it just as it is.

That's a large part of Matthew's gospel reading today.

God ----- in His abundant generosity provides us all with beautiful gifts.

Some have more gifts than others --- some have more obvious gifts than others ----- but we are all blessed with gifts from God --- and generously.

And --- “Generously” ----- because in truth ----- we have done nothing to earn or deserve them.

In Matthew’s gospel today the master gives 8 bags of gold to his servants.

To one he gives 5 --- to another 2 ---- and to another 1.

And according to verse 15 --- he does this --- “each according to his ability.”

So it is with God ---- He provides us with that which we are capable of handling and managing ---- “each according to our ability.”

And in the parable the first two servants put their talents to good use ---- improving them --- nurturing and exercising them ----- growing them --- doubling them even.

But the third servant is overcome with fear ---- and simply holds on to what he was so graciously blessed with.

People who act on fear ---- holding and hiding things ---- end up killing them off ---- or at least allowing them to rot away.

People who trust ----- nurture and exercise ----- share and grow their gifts.

People who fear ---- hold and hide.

People who trust --- joyfully ---- nurture and exercise.

At some point in life ---- we all come to the point in our lives where we either act out of fear --- and guilt ---- and other negative emotions --- and motivations.

Or ----- we act out of gratitude --- and joy ---- and find our motivation in far more positive --- productive --- and --- faithful ways.

As we’ve worked our way through the latter part of Matthew’s gospel -----
----- 9 out of the 10 past weeks ----- it’s become more and more obvious to me that Jesus has very pointed ---- and often even blunt about much of what He is saying.

Yes He is pastoral and caring and considerate ----- but He is also quite blunt --- and clear and pointed --- just as He is in today's passage.

Indeed in verse 26 the servant who simply held on to what he was so graciously blessed with is called wicked and lazy ----- "wicked and lazy".

If we are given a talent --- a blessing from God ---- whatever it may be --- time --- talent --- money ---- 1 --- 2 or all of these.

And all we do throughout our life is hold onto it without ever having even tried to nurture or exercise it ---- we are --- according to Jesus today ----- "wicked and lazy".

Even if the third servant had of simply invested the bag of gold in the bank - ---- he would have at least been nurturing it --- in a kind of passive way for sure ----- but at least he would have grown it even if ever so slightly.

But he didn't --- he dug a hole in the ground and hid it --- out of fear ---- "I was afraid and went out and hid it" ----- he says in verse 25.

Fear --- crippled him.

And so the gold ---- the talent --- the gift ----- is taken away from him --- and given to someone else.

The first servant who started out with five ---- and then made ten --- now has eleven ----- because the one of the wicked and lazy servant has now been added to his ----- making 11 --- where once there were only 5.

If a piano player does nothing to nurture and exercise their gift --- their ability to play will eventually fall by the way side --- and it becomes a struggle to play what was once easy and perhaps even effortless.

You can't hold on --- hide --- your gift and expect it to be there whenever it is you might decide to reach back and exercise it.

It has to be nurtured and exercised regularly in order to simply keep it ----- -- let alone grow and expand it.

Similarly if the piano player -- or any gift for that matter ----- nurtures and exercises that gift ----- it grows --- it grows the same way the first servants 5 bags of gold ----- grew to 10 --- and then 11.

What starts out with chop sticks or --- twinkle twinkle little star ----- can --- God willing ----- end up at Rachmaninoff's 3rd concerto.

When Jesus says ---- "For whoever has will be given more ----- and they will have an abundance. ----- Whoever does not have ---- even what they have will be taken from them." ---- as He does in verse 29 today.

Part of what He means is that when we nurture and exercise the gift ----- we have been blessed with it will grow ---- and we will have an abundance ---- and conversely --- if we do not nurture and exercise them ---- they fade away ----- are taken away by time.

And ---- like it or lump it --- that's just the way it is ---- that's a truth of life - --- and according to Jesus in Matthew's gospel ----- it's a Biblical truth.

Use it or lose it.

Use it ----- nurture and exercise it ----- and it will grow.

Don't use it --- don't exercise it ----- and watch it fade away.

Fear is what causes the third servant to simply hold on to what he was blessed with.

And fear is crippling.

I am forever saying to Kate --- it's become a bit of a joke in our household -- ----- "The only thing to fear is fear itself."

And she rolls her eyes ----- and she rolls her eyes ---- not because it's false -- - but because I think I may have overdone it a bit and said it too many times.

But it is true ----- Franklin Delano Roosevelt had it right ----- "The only thing to fear is fear itself." --- because at its core fear is crippling.

Instead we are called to respond faithfully --- and with joy.

Whatever gift --- or gifts ----- we are blessed with we are to uphold --- and nurture ----- and exercise ----- and share with joy.

Because when we don't they die off.

And even more importantly ----- when we don't ----- we clearly demonstrate that our life is not really about the blessings we receive from God -----and instead is all selfishly about us.

When we hide or hinder or hold on to our gifts without also exercising them ----- we are in effect saying to God -----

“Hey God ----- forget about what you have so generously and graciously blessed me with --- I'm more concerned with me ---- how it affects me ---- how I feel about the particular gifts you have blessed me with ----- how and what I am supposed to do with them---- and so on.

God --- I'm not going to exercise them because ----- I'm more concerned with me ---- how I feel ----- than with anything you might want to do.”

Our motivation for getting busy with our talents ought not be fear or guilt or --- “Well it's just too taxing.” ----- but the very joy with which that gift or talent was handed out with by God in the first place.

And to be very clear --- it's not about what we do verses what God does.

It's not about what we do ----- as opposed to what God does ---- as if these are ever even 2 separate things.

Instead ----- it is a matter of us cooperating with God by participating with Him ----- and giving ourselves over to Him ----- and His great plan of cosmic salvation and restoration.

It's not about what we do ---- it's all about ----- us cooperating with God by participating with Him ----- and giving ourselves over to Him ----- and His great plan of cosmic salvation and restoration.

This bears repeating ---- indeed it bears repeating again and again and again
----- so here it is again.

It's not about what we do ----- it's all about us cooperating with God by
participating with Him ----- and giving ourselves over to Him ----- and His
great plan of cosmic salvation and restoration.

In other words ----- nurturing and growing our gifts isn't about earning
something ---
----- favour
-- restoration
--- salvation
--- brownie points
--- a special seat ----- maybe the one next to Jesus in heaven.

Rather ----- nurturing and growing ---- exercising our graciously God
given talents ----- is all about us demonstrating our willingness to cooperate
----- and participate with God ---- in His great plan for His creation.

It's big stuff --- huge stuff.

Important stuff ----- what we choose to do ---- with our God given talents.

How we view the gracious gifts that God bestows upon us ----- in fear ---
with suspicion --- or with hope and joy.

Near the end of C.S. Lewis' 7 book masterpiece the Chronicles of Narnia ---
-- there is the following scene.

Aslan the Lion takes everyone to the New Narnia ---- including the books 3
main characters ---- Lucy, Edmund and Peter.

And the New Narnia ---- represents what we would refer to as Heaven.

It is a place of incredibly wonder and beauty ----- peace --- and freedom ---
the land of plenty and then some.

Everything is clothed in beauty and every creature sings of the joy of God.

It is a place where everything is so real and perfect --- it's a place where everything is just as God intended.

Grass is like grass never seen before ---- lush and green as green can be ----- no weeds no dandelions ----- and the flowers are more radiant and have a pop and beauty like never before.

It's breathtaking.

And then ----- in the midst of all this beauty and splendour ---- the children take in a group of dwarves all huddled together who are convinced that they are sitting in the middle of a stinky old barn.

A place so dark and dank that they are unable to see their hands in front of their faces.

Lucy --- so visibly upset that the dwarves are unable to enjoy the New Narnia --- Heaven ----- begs Aslan to somehow open their eyes to see all the beauty that surrounds them.

Aslan replies to Lucy saying ---- "Dearest Lucy, I will show you what I can do and also what I cannot do."

He then shakes his beautiful golden mane and suddenly a sumptuous banquet instantly appears right in front of the dwarves.

Indeed each dwarf is provided with a plate heaping with juicy meats ---- perfectly glistening vegetables and plump full grains of rice.

And each dwarf also receives a goblet brimming with the very finest of wine.

And yet when the dwarves dig in and start to eat ---- they gag and complain.

"Not only are we in this stinky old stable ---- but all we have to eat is this dried up hay and cow dung."

Similarly when they sip the wine ---- the sputter and spit ---- saying ----- "And what's this ----- how disgusting --- it's like dirty water from a donkey's trough!"

The dwarves ---- Aslan goes on to explain to Lucy ----- chose suspicion ---- or fear ---- instead of trust and love --- and joy.

And therefore --- they are simply prisoners of their own doing.

They could not see Aslan's gift as something given in joy for them to be a part of.

This is kind of what is happening with the third servant in Matthew's gospel reading today ---- isn't it.

He is unable to see the goodness of the master in giving him a bag of gold.

And he chooses fear ---- over joy.

He chooses to hide away what he has been blessed with instead of nurturing and exercising it.

His fear cripples him.

So much so that he actually loses the gift in the first place.

So much so that Jesus refers to him ---- in verse 26 ---- as "wicked and lazy".

So much so that Jesus says ---- in verse 30 ----- "...throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Use it ---- or lose it.

And ---- oh yeah --- by the way ----- us it for the benefit of all --- and not just yourself ----- or lose it.

This parable is not just about some kind of nurturing and exercising for the goal of mere self satisfaction or actualization.

Rather the parable is all about ----- giving ourselves over to God for God to use us as He sees fit.

Cooperating with God---- participating with God in His great rescue plan for His creation.

Nurture and exercise.

Or be all crippled up in fear and end up losing it all.

The choice is ours.

God doesn't and will not ever ----- force anything upon us.

He graciously blesses with choice.

And He graciously blesses us with gifts.

We can receive them in joy and nurture and exercise them --- expanding -----
- growing --- and sharing them.

Or we can react with fear --- and watch those gifts die away leaving us feeling empty --- tortured and frustrated.

The choice is ours.

God is forever blessing us with the gifts that He deems appropriate and right and fitting for each and every one of us.

We can have eyes and hearts that see them for what they are --- gifts to be celebrated ----- and get on with it.

Or we can react with fear --- and be blinded and crippled by fear.

In Matthew's gospel today Jesus says the kingdom of heaven will be like ...
----- and He goes on to tell this parable of the 3 servants and the 8 bags of gold.

2 servants are faithful and nurture and exercise the gifts freely given.

And 1 is crippled by fear --- and sees' what he has been blessed with as a burden instead of a joy.

What kind of servant are we?

Each and every one of us ---- is either like the first 2 faithful ones ----- or the last crippled up and unhappy one.

Only we can decide ---- who and what we choose to be.

Fearful and burdened.

Or joyous ----- opportunistic ---- and faithful.

Amen.