

As you may be aware, there's a longer version of this parable, in which three servants were given five talents, two talents and one talent, respectively. Two of them produced a return for their master, and the third, out of fear, buried his and simply gave it back upon his master's return. Unfortunately for him, that was exactly the wrong move. If the game of life is all about love, fear's a non-starter.

When I was chatting with God about what to say today, I got the unequivocal answer "Use the short form, Tim; folks are busy. Just tell my people that I love them, would delight in seeing them grow in love, and have no interest in terrorizing them." As God was telling me that, God led me to remember St. Hilary of Poitiers' explanation that the fear of God consists wholly in love.¹ The word 'fear,' he explained, needs to be understood to mean 'awe,' not terror.

Not everyone sees it that way, though. My friend Pete didn't like this parable at all. "If I knew that my master was a demanding person who expects you to pull stuff out of the air, I'd hide my talent, too," Pete told me on one of our Sunday walks. "That way, I wouldn't run the risk of losing any of his money and getting beaten up. You know, maybe those two other guys took one of their talents and buried it, too, just in case. It doesn't say. What would be wrong with covering your bets?"

"There's no need for us to make stuff up like that, Pete," I said. "But tell me - do you think this parable is really about fear and money?"

"Sounds like it," he replied.

"Maybe Jesus means something different when he uses the images of 'talents' and fear," I proposed.

"What do you think he means?" Pete asked.

"Well, for starters, a talent is a huge amount of gold, Pete," I said. "Maybe since it's so precious, Jesus is using the word 'talent' to mean 'love,' which is the most precious thing in

¹ http://www.chastitysf.com/hilary_treatise.htm, November 3, 2020

God's eyes. Everybody gets some to enjoy and share, whether their life's very long, very short or anywhere in between. It's what we do with the love God has given us that matters."

"That could be, Tim," Pete agreed, "but I still think Jesus is talking about money or personal talents."

"They may indeed enter the picture at various points," I agreed, "but they're not the main focus."

"What do you mean?" Pete asked with curiosity.

"Look at it this way," I suggested, "If the talents stood for love, what do you imagine that investing the love we've been given by God would look like?"

Pete thought about that for a bit and then said: "I guess it would be things like loving your wife and kids; your friends, enjoying the stuff you like to do. Probably helping anyone who needs help, too, like consoling someone who's sad or encouraging a youngster. Maybe even doing a good job at work and treating folks there well."

"Nice, Pete," I said. "I think you're right when you say it would mean multiplying the love that was shared with you by sharing it with others. Now, tell me what it would look when love's invested in you like that."

"Hmm," Pete said, his brow furrowed, "I don't usually think of myself as receiving love. Maybe I'd be like that guy in the reading from St. Paul we heard about the perfect wife. My Joyce is like that to me. She has my heart in her hands and I never worry that it'll be crushed. I can tell her anything, and she can tell me anything, without fear. She's not so good with flax and wool, but she makes an amazing lasagna. I know she loves me and I know I love her. I see what you mean now. Love's the most precious thing, isn't it?"

"It's like that with me and my lovely Chris, too, Pete," I agreed. Then I continued, "Isn't it funny how receiving love leads us to giving even more of it away? Maybe that's why Jesus gives himself away to us so freely in the Eucharist."

"Could be," Pete agreed.

"Let's get to the ugly part now, Pete. What would burying your love look like?"

Pete's a pretty smart guy and he could see where this was going.

“If I’m following you,” he said, “then it would have to be choosing never to love anyone or anything, right?”

“Seems like that to me,” I agreed, “Love’s something we have to choose to invest, like those talents. Jesus is telling us that love’s what life’s all about. We’re asked to accept the risk that comes with making any investment; take our bruises, celebrate happier outcomes, learn to forgive, accept forgiveness ourselves, and grow in love. Choosing not to would be a poor decision. Maybe the way C.S Lewis described in that book I lent you last week called *Mere Christianity* says it best. You liked it, remember? It went like this:”

‘It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for a bird to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.’²

“Jesus calls it ‘investing’ in the parable, and Lewis calls it ‘hatching’ in his analogy, but they’re both pointing to the same thing. Grow in love or go bad and never become what we were created to be.”

“That sounds pretty chilling, Tim,” Pete shuddered. “Who would choose to be like that?”

“I don’t really know, Pete,” I said, “but they’d need to be full of fear it seems to me. We’ve been entrusted with our existence to discover that we’re made out of love and challenged to grow in love together with one another unencumbered by imaginary worries. What doesn’t work is simply refusing even to begin to love, out of fear.”

Pete nodded. Then I asked him, “Tell me, Pete, are you afraid of Joyce?”

He laughed and said, “Almost never! Are you afraid of Chris?”

I said “no” and told him the only thing I was afraid of was disappointing her; casting a shadow over our love. We murmured agreement as we came to the end of our walk, and Pete added, “You know, Tim, it’s really hard to be afraid of anyone you love and who you know loves you. It’s certainly that way with you and me, and our wives, and I understand now it’s that way down deep with God, too. Who knows? Maybe one day it’ll be like that with everyone else, too. Wouldn’t that be awesome.”

² <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/51817-it-may-be-hard-for-an-egg-to-turn-into>, November 3, 2020