

Matthew tells us this morning about the owner of an estate that had to go on a long journey leaving vast amounts of money entrusted to three servants with the responsibility of taking care of and investing the money. Two servants make wise investments and they are both commended and rewarded by their master. The third servant, however, was overly cautious, so conservative that he ends up burying the money. His lack of action infuriated the master and the servant was harshly rebuked.

It is difficult to understand these characters within the roles they each play in the narrative. Each person can be seen in contradictory terms. When you look closely at the landowner, it is hard to determine if he is a good or a bad guy. Is he decent, righteous, and generous to his servants or is he just a nasty rascal that condemns his servant when he fails to meet his expectations?

And what about the three servants each given an excessive amount of money to oversee – what are we to make of them, particularly the risk-averse, fearful man that buried his talents in a hole so that the exorbitant wealth would remain safe?

I believe focusing on this last servant and his relationship with his master will provide us with some insight.

I feel sorry for this servant and I can certainly understand why he buried the master's money in a hole in the ground for safe-keeping. Apparently, it was a common practice and he believed this to be the best way of keeping valuable possessions in a secure place.

However, the master gave him the oversight responsibility of a great deal of money to invest and this he did not do. Hence, he disappointed and angered his master.

To be honest, there have been times when I failed, well – perhaps not so much failed- but didn't take advantage of the gifts, those resources provided to me. I assume this is also the case for more than a few of us. To be transparent, I confess I didn't take advantage of what I had because I was afraid. I was like this servant, fearful and afraid of his master and what his reaction would be if he failed to meet the master's expectations.

Initially, when I read this parable, I didn't question or wonder if the servant's assessment of his master was accurate or true. When the servant says, "I knew you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid..." I assumed the servant was correct and accepted what he said at face value because the master's response was indeed quite critical.

Upon further reflection, I now believe this servant had a distorted image or view of the landowner. Is it possible that he is both generous and harsh?

If you think about this master as being a metaphor for God, as many people do, you find a God that is punitive, judgmental, and unforgiving, while lacking in understanding and empathy. I would not be surprised if some of you have personally experienced God in this way.

While we might have this negative image of God as a stern, angry God, filled with retribution, we may well come to understand that when bad things happen to us or to those we love, that we are on the receiving end of mean, capricious, arbitrary, unsympathetic God. I can't tell you the number of times people question and wonder just what they did that was so horrible and awful that they deserve such cruel and unfair treatment.

Today, I ask that you think of all the grace and bounty God has bestowed upon you. God loves us without any conditions. There is nothing that anyone can do – nothing that you or I can do that will cause God to stop loving you or me. Yes, granted the master was angry and disappointed, and acted out on those feeling when this servant did not meet his expectations – but keep in mind, remember this master is not our God unless we chose to make God in this image.

Life is going to present us with challenges, hardships, and many disappointments, but God showers us with his love. Our God is a God of love. You can take this love to the bank. God proved the depth of his love humankind, the pinnacle of his creation, ... you and me when he sent his beloved son, Jesus to die on the cross for us. Jesus is the proof of God's immense love for each of us today, tomorrow, and for ever and ever!

Let us pray:

*Lord God, help us recognize you as the one who brings forgiveness, love, and mercy. Help us to see this true vision of you so that we may transform who we are, and how we live. This we pray in the name of your Son, our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*