

As children, I'm sure most of us grew up being taught that everyone was born with gifts.

Some gifts were obvious: the pretty girl everyone wanted to date, the jock who—singlehandedly it sometimes seemed—won the state football tournaments. Some gifts were less obvious—the quiet kid who listened well. The theatre nerd who made everyone laugh.

*Jesus said, "It is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability."*

Well-- first of all—the reading this week begins with “it is as if”. Which begs the question WHAT is as if? So how many of you—with a show of hands—remembers what IT is as if? Anyone?

I think I see Brother Donovan out there saying, “ooh, ooh---I know, I know!” Which is why he never got to answer questions in Chapel.

Here's the answer: *“The kingdom of heaven is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves”* etc etc.

Ahhhh—another metaphor, you say. Yes, very good young padawan. It is indeed another metaphor.

The kingdom of heaven (which is “among us”, “within us”, remember...) is a place where gifts are given out to everyone. Some are lucky enough to have a bunch of them, some fewer. But God gives them to everyone.

So—the point of this metaphor is: what do we do with them?

Some are fearless—they recognize what they have and they go out with joy—using what they have been given. I think those are people who see their gifts as what they are: something they didn't earn or work for—they were born with it.

These are the people who use the gifts they have lavishly. And then—you know what? Because they used the first gifts, they discover OTHER gifts.

It's the like a person who was gifted with a love of language. After a while this lift of listening and loving languages morphed into the ability to pick up new languages fairly quickly. When the person realized this, she became even more curious about different languages she heard being spoken around her. So she learned those languages. Soon she knew several languages. And it was fun to speak with people who spoke other languages, and it opened up her world.

As she started to talk to the people in all the cool languages, she discovered the additional gift of being able to help people understand each other, to communicate cross- culturally. This led to new understandings between all the friends this person had made, and new strides were made in her school, and later-- in city planning, and government. Through her encouragement—another gift she'd discovered--- everyone began to understand each other, and before she knew it, she was offered a job in communications at the UN.

And it all began with the first gift.

We all do this to a greater or lesser extent. One of our gifts leads us to discover other ones.

And it's always a risk—to step out in faith—to use our gifts. But God gave them to us for a reason. And what is faith, really? It's trusting that God gave us all gifts, stepping out and doing something with the gifts we have—knowing that God will meet us there.

I knew a person whose gift was being calm and still when everyone around him was panicking. I'm not at all sure he even saw this personality trait as a gift, but if you were in a room full of agitated people – and this person's presence could steady the room, quieting people down—you would definitely see this as a gift. Interestingly, my friend had heard his whole life that he wasn't enough of a charismatic leader. But there are many ways of leading, and many types of leaders.

After all – who would you want at the tiller if the seas were crashing around you? Someone who ratcheted up the anxiety, bulling through the waves—or someone who was reassuringly calm and steady?

This man could have buried his gift, fearful that he wasn't the right kind of leader. It's easy to do if you only listen to negative feedback, or get caught in your own fear. Fear can destroy any gift from God. Like that third slave in the gospel.

He said he knew that the Master, was a harsh man, and he was afraid. Some people who hear this passage take this as a statement of truth. They assume the master IS a harsh man. But is he? Listen to the master's answer.

You "knew" did you, that I was a harsh man?

I wonder how many poor choices we make because we think we "know" something – that isn't true? How many times do we not honor a gift we have been blessed with God by—because we are afraid to?

God even asks him: couldn't you even have just thought about your gift—banked it for the future, let it germinate in the soil of your soul? Did you have to bury it where even you couldn't touch it?

The third man didn't wail and gnash his teeth because God was a harsh master. He wailed because he listened to his fears—assumed that everything he thought was the truth. He gnashed his teeth because he'd wasted his gift.

God doesn't give us gifts so we can make more gifts for HIM, but so that we can multiply our gifts for ourselves.

Because in the kingdom of God, when we use our gifts, we discover to our joy we can do more and be more. And then God is pleased. Amen.