

Ottawa Mennonite Church  
November 16, 2008  
Text: Matthew 25:14-30  
Title: The Riskiness of Talents

I watched again for the first time this week the Disney Pixar Movie, Finding Nemo. It is a story about a small clown fish family. Traumatized after his partner was eaten by a barracuda, Marlin promises to never leave and always protect his young son, Nemo. As Nemo grows up, he demonstrates the eagerness and excitement of wanting to explore out and beyond the coral reef where he grew up.



Marlin, Nemo's father, on the other hand, plays the role of the over protective parent, who, if he had his way, would bubble wrap his son. But after his son is 'kidnapped' by an eager and overzealous dentist, Marlin is forced to take risks to rescue his son, the least of which is leaving his comfort zone of his home, the coral reef.

### **The Frightened Slave**

When I read this parable, I immediately gravitate towards the servant who was given 1 talent, who chose the more prudent approach and buried the talent in the ground. It just seems more reasonable to me, than to invest 15 years worth of wages in the stock market, especially with the current market conditions. While it might have been a little smarter to place the money in a high interest savings account, sometimes it is just easier to bury it in the back yard. However it is not the prudent servant who is praised, but instead it is the two servants who choose to invest, trade and take risks with their given talents that are rewarded.

I must confess that I am one who does not like to take risks; however, sometimes it is inevitable.

Moving from Niagara to Indiana was a risk. Moving from Indiana, to Ottawa too was a risk. Both of these risks brought me outside of my comfort zone, but the reward was worth the risk. Listening to God, and following God's call, has and continues to pull me out of my comfort zone.

Risk is not always good, Risk is a scary thing. Risk means doing things that are not safe. Risk means doing things that are not prudent. There are smart risks and there are not so smart risks. This parable praises smart risks. We don't normally give it much thought but joining the church is a risky thing, becoming Christian is a risky thing..

## **What do we risk?**

When we join the Christian church we become part of something larger than ourselves. By joining the Christian church we participate in the furthering of God's work on Earth, we follow and obey the call of Jesus Christ. As a community of believers who follow Jesus Christ we enter into a strange new and risky life, this is no small measure, nothing to take on lightly. Following Jesus is a risky venture. It is something that ultimately will transform you as an individual, transform us as a community.

The apostles took a risk, when Jesus called to them "Follow Me", they got up, left their lively hood, left their boat, their nets, their life, their income, everything that they knew. They left everything behind to follow this radical teacher. They were following a teacher who appeared to be an illegitimate child, raised as a carpenter, who once he started his ministry did a great many risky things. Following Christ was a big risk. Once Christ started his ministry the people Christ ministered to, the people Christ called. The circles Christ travelled in, the people Christ ate with, the places Christ went; were all contrary to common logic and thought, and that was risky especially in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel/Palestine, and because they were following this risky teacher they too were thrust into these same situations.

Like the apostles who gave up everything to follow a wandering preacher, we too give up a great deal of comfort when we choose to follow Christ.

When we follow Jesus we risk our lives. We follow Christ into situations that are risky and uncomfortable. We go to places where people wouldn't normally go, we interact with people who most won't, and we do things that are just plain old different when we follow Jesus. When we allow ourselves to live lives that are in line with God's will, and this will is not always in line with society or with the world around us.

## **Following Jesus is Risky!**

Following Jesus is counter cultural. Being Mennonite is counter cultural.

As Anabaptists living in the world today we live distinctively different lives than others in the world around us. Every day we are bombarded by messages of how we should live.

We need to biggest SUV so that we can navigate the difficult terrain which Ottawa assaults us with.  
We need to get the biggest TV with HD so that we can to watch the Stanley cup in all it's glory. After all we need to be able to see each individual bead of sweat on the faces of the players just so that we know they are real.

We must watch the newest reality show complete with the newest television commercials designed for one purpose and one purpose alone; to sell us more 'stuff'.

If stuff does not make you happy than the only way one can be happy is to force one's body shape to match that of an unreasonably thin young adult. I had better sign up for the biggest loser or give Jenny Craig a call.

If that doesn't solve it, then there has to be a pill which will take care of your problem, ask you doctor if Calias is right for you.

Additionally one had better make sure you call Geico, because 15 minutes can save you 15% or more on your car insurance, and if you sign up with ING you can 'save your money'

Thank heaven there's 7-11, take heart because it's always fresh at Tim Hortons and why not while were at it be sure that you can have it your way at Harveys.

Life takes Visa. For everything else there is Master Card.

And really it all boils down to being told, Just Do It. I'm Lovin' it!

But we choose instead to follow a different life. We do things that put us as risk, we risk swimming against the stream, we act counter to the common status quo, and we risk being ostracized.

Some of us recycle and repair, when the culture tells us to dispose and replace.

Some use different light bulbs to use less energy.

Some selectively flush our toilets to conserve water,

Some participate in CPT to bring peace to areas of conflict, others travel overseas,

Some shop locally,

Some buy fair trade,

Some buy organic food,

Some bike instead of drive.

For others it may mean living a life of reduction.

Giving up luxuries and discerning between needs and wants.

Some don't shop on Sundays

Some drive SMART cars rather than SUV's

Some might chose demotion rather than working for an ethically ambiguous business

And there are many more risks we take that I haven't mentioned.

Above these unique ways of living, there are things which we as Anabaptists hold in common.

We commit ourselves to peacemaking, to nonviolent resolution of conflict.

We pray for our meals and for each other

We choose to not swear oaths,

We live a life where the 'we and us' is more important than 'I and me'

We live lives where generosity takes precedence over selfishness

And all of us here are giving an hour or more in service to and in worship of God.

We choose to take risks and to follow a different set of messages. We follow messages that tell us to love God and to love our neighbour, messages that tell us to take a day off and rest, setting it aside for God. Messages that are counter to the world around us. The risky message of Jesus calls us to bless the poor, comfort those who mourn, be gentle, provide for the hungry and thirsty, be merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and finally we must be willing to be persecuted. The last one is incredibly risky.

God grants to us many things, but they are not for us to hide, or hoard, or to bury in the back yard.

While that may appear to be safe, prudent, a sure bet, that is not what God expects. God expects us to take risks, to invest our gifts, to share them, to trade them, to cause them to multiply, to take risks with them so that they might double.

Each day we wake up and choose to take a risk, to risk ourselves for the sake of the Gospel. We choose to risk ourselves for God's sake. We choose to risk our lives; we choose to live in a way that is different from the rest of the world. So that when Christ returns and settles accounts with us, we can approach Christ and say, "Master, this is what you handed over, and this is what I did."

Amen.