

Sermon for Proper 28 Year A
The Twenty-fourth Sunday After Pentecost
November 19, 2017
The Rev. Paul LeClair

Zephaniah 1:7,12-18 Psalm 90:1-8, 12 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Matthew 25:14-30

In the Name of God,
whose power in us, can do infinitely more
than we can ask for or imagine. Amen

- Ephesians 3:20

This sermon was written by Paul LeClair, but since he is unable to be here today he asked me to read it for him.

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As I look around the room today, I get a feeling that many of us have heard the Parable of the Talents many times before.

We've also learned over the years that in Jesus' parables, the real message that he's conveying is not found in the story line.

The truth that lies beneath the details of the parable.

For instance, Jesus's parable of the talents is not giving financial advice about the best way to make investment decisions.

Even though, in Jesus' time, a talent was a very valuable coin, he wasn't teaching about money.

In our time, we tend to think of a talent as a special ability.

Lois and Darnell have a talent for music. Inge and Kay are talented knitters.

Our own, Mr. Fix-it, Dave, has a talent for, well ... fixing stuff.

It's easy for us to conceive that this is the kind of talent that lies within today's parable. And it may be...but ...

Let's imagine that besides being a natural ability, a talent could be an experience.

Consider the possibility that a difficult and challenging experience such as being diagnosed with cancer; or having ones career or vocation become obsolete; or losing one of our senses, such as sight or hearing; or suffering from PTSD, as being a talent. Say what .....

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Brigadier General Donald Bolduc had the mindset that:

“Green Berets don't get post-traumatic stress disorder. Especially generals. You don't seek help. You tough it out.”

But after returning from eight combat tours,

General Bolduc began suffering from severe headaches.

He was moody. He couldn't sleep. Even his balance was off.

It took 12 years from his first battlefield trauma for him to seek help.

But at his wife's urging, he did something unthinkable in military macho culture.

He sought medical help.

He learned that he not only suffered from PTSD,

he also had a bullet-size spot on his brain,

an injury probably suffered in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan in 2005;

an incident that the general walked away from.

Now, after three years of treatment, General Bolduc is doing more than well.

He's now commander of American Special Operations Forces,

battling terrorist groups in Africa.

He's also become an evangelist for letting soldiers in his command know

that it's all right to get help for mental health problems and brain injuries.

He makes it clear to his soldiers that seeking help will not hurt their careers.

To General Bolduc, their Commanding Officer, PTSD is the same as a broken arm.

"The powerful thing is, that I can use myself as an example," General Balduc says.

"And thank goodness, not everybody can do that.

But I am able to do it, so what I say has some sort of . . . credibility to it."

General Bolduc's trauma-turned-talent is now helping bring an end to the stigma attached to seeking help for PTSD.

Now other high-ranking officers are coming forward.

They're also talking openly about their own struggles with post-combat stress and with brain injuries.

The Defense Department estimates that a quarter of all injuries suffered by U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Iraq were brain injuries.

Every time a new soldier comes into his command,

General Bolduc tells his personal story.

He urges anyone experiencing the same kind of symptoms to get help.

Recently, General Bolduc was visiting a team under his command who had just returned from battle.

He asked how many of them had been close to blasts, bombs and mortar shells.

Everyone raised a hand. Then he asked how many had sought treatment.

No one's hand went up. So General Bolduc told them his own story.

All of them men decided to get exams.

Because of this, a tumor in one soldier's brain, that would have gone unnoticed, was found in time and was treated at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington.

This Army general used his experience and position to confront a serious medical and psychological issue affecting thousands of soldiers. Now he devotes the "talent" entrusted to him, his traumatic experience, to reap a harvest of hope and of healing. He brings light to those who are lost in a darkness of illness and fear.



Jesus' Parable of the Talents can help us focus on the truth within the story. It reminds us that what we possess, in terms of skills and ability, is not the treasure. The treasure is our willingness to use those things that we see as gifts. Even our scars, our trials, setbacks, and personal challenges, can become gifts to share, to make the Kingdom of God a reality, here and now. One may inspire others by sharing their faith story. Another might bring healing by listening to a person in their pain. The words of someone who has lived with a debilitating illness can often be heard and understood more than those of a hospital department head. A heart that has felt rejection can create an eye that notices a lonely stranger. A stomach that knows the pangs of hunger often becomes the hands that stir the soup at Crossroads.

During the Thanksgiving holiday, in addition to enjoying the parade; tasting the turkey (and whatever someone decided to season with pumpkin spice); taking a post-turkey nap; and watching the football game; many of us will take time to give thanks for all of God's blessings. As we do this, let's be open to letting the Spirit of God, prompt us to use our "talents," whatever they may be. Our abilities and disabilities; our skills and our set-backs; can all be used for the common good.

Let's all pray for the eyes of our hearts to be opened, so we may see how each of us can bring healing to the broken, and offer hope to the struggling, as we imitate our Savior, Jesus to make the peace of God's Kingdom a present and tangible reality in our time and in our place. Amen.

Sources:

The New Interpreters Study Bible, NRSV with Apocrypha, Abington Press, Nashville, 2003

A General's New Mission: Leading the Charge Against PTSD, Dionne Searcy, The New York Times, October 7, 2016.

Sermon for Proper 28 Year A, Fr. Tony Clavier, rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, La Porte, Indiana *Connections*, November 2017, MediaWorks, Londonderry, N.H.