



Who's a Scaredy-Cat? TouchPoint for November 11, 2020

Matthew 25:14-30 (MSG) *"It's also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master's investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master's money.*

"After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.' "The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.' "The servant given one thousand said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.'

"The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest. "Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this "play-it-safe" who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.'

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"...so I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground."

Fear cannot be the basis for a relationship with God. So much of our lives are lived out of fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of the known. Fear of what could happen, fear of what has happened.

And mostly what we are afraid of is what we can't control – what is outside of our control.

And so, we fear the past because it might catch up to us. And we fear the future because who knows what might happen. And the present, well, what chance does it have when boxed in by all that fear.

Mostly what we are afraid of is what we can't control – what is outside of our control.

And so, God is one of our greatest fears because God is the ultimate One we cannot control. And so we bargain, barter, and trade with God. We come up with all kinds of theologies to tame God...obligate God...reduce God to a reward and punishment system. Why we even turn the cross into a payoff scheme, though who is being paid and why God needs to pay can get more than a little confusing.

You see, it's much easier to worship and celebrate a God who works in a system we can control, than a God who stands outside of all systems.

I think growing up I was mainly taught to fear God and I'm not talking about the 'respect and awe' kind of fear of God the Bible and Luther talk about: like when you stand at the edge of the ocean and view a spectacular sunset...or witness the birth of a child...or stare into the mystery of your garden as you watch

the worms and bugs and rain and sunshine, and earth and seed all come together... And you feel your smallness in the face of creation even as you feel a part of it.

No, I'm talking about the 'be afraid, Darth Vader' kind of fear. The angry, "I'm coming for you" kind of fear. The "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" kind of fear. That's the kind of fear I was taught about God. And the solution to that 'be afraid' kind of fear was always an action, a belief, a commitment on my part that could hold at bay the God who was coming to get me. (And not coming to get me in a good way.) I would say it was a 'give and take' kind of situation...but it was more like a 'take and give' kind of situation. An angry God was coming to 'take' back my life unless I 'gave' God something first to assuage God's anger.

But fear cannot be the basis for a relationship with God. I'm not sure when that changed. I'm not sure how it changed. I'm pretty sure it wasn't a sudden onetime thing, because I probably would have remembered that. No, I think that kind of fear died a slow death. A death by a thousand cuts – a thousand cuts of grace. Now it might seem strange to describe something as a death by a thousand cuts of grace but heck, if an instrument of torture like the cross can be the central symbol of grace, mercy and forgiveness...then I think I can get away with using the phrase, 'death by a thousand cuts of grace'.

But I think that's what happened to me. Various people, at various times in my life have shown grace and mercy and forgiveness to me. Various people at various times, who had every right to 'come and get me', didn't... In fact, it seemed as if it never crossed their minds.

And it doesn't seem to ever stop – these points of grace, these encounters of grace in my life. And they seem to continue to do their work of attacking my fear, which seems to be ever present, and haunts me in the deepest recesses of my life. The fear of not measuring up, not being good enough, of not pulling my weight, in the eyes of God.

And so, these thousand cuts of grace have changed the way I see God and experience God.

Now after reading this parable we shared today, the old default would be to focus on the third slave. But if I did this – if I focused solely on the third slave and what he did wrong, and how you better not do what he did or God will get you – then I would actually be reinforcing the belief of the third slave and would be holding him up as good example of how one needs to think about God. Vengeful... coming to get you...angry...

But I don't think that is the point of the parable.

I don't think the point is to say, "Stop being afraid of God or God will send you to Hell." That would be kind of like the time I spanked my oldest son for hitting his younger brother, and as I was spanking him, I said, "You need to learn we don't hit each other in this family." And he just gave me this look like, "What kind of idiot do I have as a father?" It wouldn't be the last time he gave me that look.

Rather, I am struck by the opening lines of this parable, "...to one he GAVE 5 talents...to another he GAVE 2...to another he GAVE 1." He GAVE. He GAVE. He entrusts. He gives. This is who our God is. This is what our God does. He hangs on a cross and gives forgiveness. He comes back from the dead to those who denied and betrayed him and gives them his peace.

This is who our God is. This is what our God does.

And to set this God up as a God who is first and foremost to be feared as vengeful and angry, is to negate

the whole life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And if the parable tells us anything in respect to this, it would be that God despises being thought of as a God to be feared as vengeful and angry. In fact, it seems to be the only thing God gets angry and vengeful about.

And the only way God can get out of that is to hang on a cross and ultimately declare forgiveness as his last word over humanity. To declare once and for all that He is a God of forgiveness, grace and mercy by actually doing forgiveness and grace and mercy... As his last act on earth.

This is how the cross satisfies the wrath of God. God is only satisfied when he can actually do...work...have... forgiveness, grace and mercy on you and me.

God is only satisfied when God can put to death forever the idea that he is first and last, or ultimately a God of anger and vengeance.

This is who our God is. This is what our God does.

And so, two out of the three servants act out of this grace. They live in it. They work in it. To paraphrase part of a bible verse I am quite fond of, "They live and move and have their being... in it." Why is that? Why do 2 live and move and have their being in grace? And why does one stay and live and move in fear?

I don't know. I can't answer that. But I can tell you this from my experience in life. Yelling at someone. Screaming at someone. Threatening someone to not live in fear...OR ELSE... Doesn't really work. In fact, it kind of only reinforces the fear.

And that is why when you hear the words, "Fear not" or "Be not afraid" in the Bible, they are always followed with, "Because you have found favor with God" or, "For I bring you good news of great joy." or "For God is with you."

You see, the only thing that can kill that fear is to constantly hear over and over again...you are loved, you are graced, you are mercied, and you are forgiven. It is only the constant hearing of that in my life, that can calm the fears and quiet the whispers of unacceptability, of unworthiness, of not measuring up that haunt my life at 3 am and all hours of the day... and make me want to bury my life in the ground.

Which is the exact opposite of living and moving and having one's being. It is only in hearing THAT love, THAT grace, THAT mercy... that fear can be cast out.

Now this may come as a surprise to you, but all of this kind of reminds me of this meal and the night of its giving. I think it is safe to say that this was a night of great fear on the part of the disciples. Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial... and the rest running away were driven by fear. That, it seems to me is fairly obvious.

And what does Jesus do? Scream in their face "Do not be afraid"? Does Jesus get angry and vengeful...?

I think you know the answer to that. "Take and eat. Take and drink. This is my body and blood given and shed for you."

These are the words he spoke to their fears. These are the words he speaks to our fears. So the life we have buried in fear...can be resurrected to live and move and have its being in God's grace. Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God

Come O Lord and Set Us Free

Come, O Lord and set us free.

Give/Bring your people peace.

Come, O Lord and set us free.

Come Lord Jesus, Come.

1. And take our guilt away. Give us your pardon Lord.
2. Free from our self-obsession. Free from each fond possession.
3. Free to affirm each other...as sister and as brother
4. Reshape the world you made. Let what your hand created...be always celebrated.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Lord's Prayer

The Meal

Let Us Break Bread Together

Let us 1) break bread, 2) drink wine, 3) praise God
together on our knees (repeat)

When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me

Benediction

A Blessing

May the Lord bless you.
May the Lord protect you and guide you.
May His strength uphold you.
His light shine upon you.
His peace surround you.
His love enfold you.
May the Lord bless you.