

HUNGER FOR CHANGE

NEW BUSINESS. NEW LIFE.

Biblical Reflections

“One of the wonderful things is how God depends on all of us, which is actually mind boggling because here you have God who is omnipotent and yet waits on human creatures to be God’s partners and collaborators. Each one of us has a contribution to make, each and every one of us.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

In one of the great mysteries of life, it would appear that God has put us—mere, fallible mortals—in charge of his great creation with all its wealth, abundance and bounty. It would also appear that when he made this decision, he knew it would be a mixed blessing.

In the Genesis 1 account of creation, God meticulously crafts the elements of our world together and at the end of each day the biblical account records, “God saw that it was good.” But when God creates humankind, male and female in his image, in that account we do not read this general affirmation of his creation.

With our freedom to choose, we are sometimes faithful to the needs of the earth and our fellow passengers thereon, fulfilling God’s desire for creation to flourish. But equally, we can be selfish and think only of our own power, comfort and convenience, not about what is best for our world and for others.

In the parable of the talents in Matthew’s gospel, we find a man leaving his property in various amounts to his servants for safekeeping while he is away travelling. Two of the servants invest the money they are left and double it. One servant chooses to bury the money and incurs his master’s wrath.

There are many layers to this story, but at one level, it is a description of an ancient world microcredit scheme. For the poor today as then, it was impossible to gain access to enough credit to boost them beyond the level of daily subsistence.

In the parable, one man trusts his portion of God’s blessings to his servants in amounts according to their abilities. Two of them with entrepreneurial spirits make the most of this opportunity. Matthew records the same thing after each of those accounts: Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!

Everyone benefits in this scenario—both the master and servant sharing a happiness that comes from giving and receiving and creating benefits together that go beyond the simple exchange of money. In this case, a relationship is built that creates a sense of abundance and dignity for all parties involved. This is in stark contrast to the interaction with the servant who buried the money, fearing the master and living within a mentality of scarcity.

Now, if it was just that easy, everyone would give away their money to the poor and all the poor would leverage the opportunity to break out of subsistence living without a second thought. More of us than we’d like to admit would likely do what the third servant did—bury the money and go watch another episode of Survivor where we can watch someone else live an exciting, dangerous life.

But the kind of life and care that God calls us to for this world and for our fellow inmates involves risk. For those who give, it is counter-intuitive that giving away money will bring you more rather than less happiness. And for the entrepreneurial poor, with much more at stake, taking out a loan and hoping that it will pay off when life has so few margins for error, is likewise a serious risk.

Despite the risk for all involved, our loving, creative God calls us all forward to act in faith. We are his hands to heal, lips to speak, ears to hear and heart to love. When the act of giving flows two ways, it imparts dignity and joy to life. There is no one else to do this—just us mere, mortal, fallible human beings.

Questions for small groups:

1. When was the first time you got a loan? How old were you? What did you use for collateral?
2. Without getting into intimate details, discuss each person's access to and use of credit. What things do we have in our lives right now that we wouldn't have if not for the ability we have to draw on our collateral to invest in the future for ourselves and for our families?
3. What is your response to the master's reaction to the third servant who buried his money? Was it fair?
4. How do you think the master would have reacted if one of the first two servants had invested, but lost his money?
5. What does the parable of the talents tell us about our responsibility with all of God's creation?

A blessing/reading to use to close your time together:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half truths and disconnected relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with unrest at the unnecessary injustice of hunger, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from starvation due to war, poverty, discrimination, globalization or the destruction of Creation.

May we reach out our hands in service and be blessed with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, to go out and do what others claim cannot be done.

(Adapted from Tearfund)