

of interest), his inaction certainly does not seem stack up to an offense worthy of his master calling him 'worthless' and to 'throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

If we look at this passage from the perspective of money, placing ourselves in the position of the servant, and God in the role of the master, then we begin to wonder what God thinks about what we are doing with our financial resources. If God is looking at what we are doing, or not doing, and is about to get upset and throw us into a place of, 'darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth', well, that's an incredibly disconcerting place to be.

However, as we talked about in the introduction, this parable, especially within the greater context that is placed, is not talking money. It is using money to talk about how the interests, skills, and gifts that we have been blessed with are not meant to be buried away. They are to be used, and used boldly.

This transition of thought is made a little easier in that the monetary unit that is used, the talent, actually contains the root word for the word talent that we use. Now, instead of being focused on our pocketbooks, we are now forced to examine how we use, or don't use, our "special aptitudes" or "gifts".

Let's hear the story now, with the characters shifted around, just a little bit: "God summoned his friends and entrusted the entire creation to them; to one he gave five special skills, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. The one who had received the five talents went off at once, used them, and through using them, multiplied them so that five other individuals began to use their talents to glorify God. In the same way, the one who had the two talents helped two other individuals to use their talents. But the one who had received the one special skill went off by himself, pretended like he had no special skill, and never used it."

Once the monetary connotation is taken out of the equation, this passage becomes a commentary on how believers, who have been blessed by God with a wide variety of gifts, and skills are sitting on those talents because they are afraid: afraid of failing, afraid of not living up to some artificial standard that has been created in their minds, afraid that others will not appreciate what they can do.

In that moment, we become like the superhero who decides to sit on their special skill and not use it. Even though the forces of evil may not be moving to take over the world as in the comics and now the comic book movies and shows, the world is most certainly suffering because we have not stepped up to the plate and put to use those "special aptitudes" that we have been blessed with.

Stop being afraid of failing, for even if you do, you will learn something that will ultimately lead to an even greater success. Very few advancements were made in this world without their first being a long list of missteps. What we need to remember is that while the mess-ups may sting in the short term (and they do), the successes will be so much more valuable (and memorable) in the long run. God did not bless you with skills, interests, and talents so that you would be able to realize how horribly inept we are. He bestowed those gifts so that we would use them, so that the kingdom of God is advanced in this plain of existence, so that we might be shown how valuable we are to the world, and most certainly to God.

A few days ago, Jen and I were flicking around the TV dial and ended up stopping on a 'Mysteries at the Museum' on the Travel Channel. It's one of those shows that provides quick and interesting stories...and can easily be fallen asleep to. I was trying for the latter...and I ended up with the former.

The particular story detailed a portion of the story of Alfred Nobel. Does that last name sound familiar?

If you went to the Nobel Prize, you are correct, as it was his wish that at the end of his life a foundation be formed to award distinguished advancements in the worlds of chemistry, literature, physics, medicine, and ...peace. That's how we know Nobel today.

But back in the 1800's, Nobel was known as a Swedish inventor, chemist, and businessman with 355 patents to his credit. His most famous invention? Dynamite.

When a local newspaper screwed up and wrote his obituary, instead of his brother who had died a few days prior, his world changed. Here's why, the obituary described him as, 'the merchant of death' due to the fact that he created dynamite and its (more powerful) successors. He looked at that and began to worry about how he would be remembered. So, unknown to most of his family, he set most of his ample estate up in a trust that would fund awards that served the betterment of humankind,...which included peace.

As far as I am concerned, Alfred Nobel is absolutely a version of superhero, but not because he did something that was beyond his means. All he did was use the gifts that he had been bestowed with, the resources he had earned, and put them to use in such a way that others were lifted up. I don't know whether he would have considered himself as such, but I think of Nobel as an agent of God.

The thing is, if this is the definition that we now work with, then the world is full of superheroes, people blessed with unique and special gifts.

The other night I watched a news report of a woman in the subway who told the man she was sitting next to, to give her a little more space as he had infringed upon her seat. He promptly started yelling at her and even hit her in the face. As his voice began to raise a man across the subway car stood up and interjected himself. He spoke calmly and firmly and grasped the man by his wrists. He told him that he needed to get off at the next stop...which is exactly what happened and a situation that could have been horrible became an opportunity for a superhero using his skills and gifts to emerge.

One other example: I was at Shop Rite yesterday and it was a little...tense. Apparently, Thanksgiving is coming? In any case, it was remarkable to see how people would respond to folks who would extend courtesy, kindness, and a smile: it would defuse the tension that had people running around like a turkey who had heard that it was invited to dinner. When people showed care for others amazing things were able to happen.

There are people who save others by stepping in the way, by being prepared, or by using their incredible intelligence. Nobel was ultimately called into service in his unique and memorable way, but the reality is that all of us have been called. Lets put those special attributes, those God given gifts, those unique powers to work, for as we do not only will the world be benefited but the glory of God will be revealed in ways that we once thought were impossible.

Whether you realize it or not, the gifts that you have been blessed with, when used as God would have them be used, allows you to become something that you once thought was only contained within the pages of comic books: you can become a superhero. Take that step out in faith, quit being afraid to fail, and realize that with God on your side the glory of God will ultimately be revealed. A world full of superheroes. It can happen if we all begin to use the gifts that we have been blessed with.

After Sermon Prayer

O Holy Lord, You have blessed us in so many good and wonderful ways. We have so many gifts to share with the world. The problem is that too many times we try and hide those special attributes, we try and bury them in the depths of a psyche that says we are not valuable, that we are not worthy, that we will fail. God, work in us to help us to understand that this is not the case, that the gifts that we have received are to be used, and used boldly. Lead us to all step from beyond the shadows so that the entire creation might be able to recognize that the world is full of superheroes, and we are all empowered by You.

Congregational Prayer

Thank You, gracious Lord, for the hope in which we live – that despite the lack of peace and security in the world, we know that You provide us with a peace that surpasses our understanding. Enlighten us with the confidence we seek, that our salvation is secure through our Lord Jesus Christ. Bless us with certainty, so that we may be ambassadors of Your love and caretakers of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We come to You now with the prayers of this congregation as we are able to find them in the prayer list this morning. We pray for **(Give List)** We also pause so that we might be able to approach You in the silence of this building. Lord, hear our prayers as we come to You now. **(Long Pause)**

Lord, we thank You for this time of prayer, for all of the ways that You have blessed us, for all of the ways that we are able to use these gifts so that the world might be bettered and Your blessed name acknowledged. We pray in Your name. Amen.