

## **Investing in Love**

Luke 19:11-26

Crossroads Christian Church

Jeremiah 32:1-3, 6-15

Stewardship Sunday

October 13, 2013

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You've been invited to give to God and the church, to make an investment in the ministry of Crossroads Christian Church. You heard and said aloud part of a story on investing in God during our lesson from Jeremiah. Just as he had predicted, everything had fallen apart in Jerusalem. The land was conquered by the Babylonians. There seemed to be no future for the Jews, except for a future in exile many hundred miles away. It was a bear market, as people sold off their investments and assets. But Jeremiah, instructed by God, made a real estate transaction—he purchased a plot of land from a relative, put the deed in a clay jar, and buried it for future reference. The prophet was saying, "I'm making an investment that we will have a future." Whether or not it came in Jeremiah's lifetime was irrelevant—the message was there—ultimately, our future is safe in God's hands.

When we invest in God, we invest in joy.

Joy can come from knowing that your gift multiplies. Remember the boy who shared his lunch of a few fish and small loaves of bread? Jesus blessed them and fed the multitude. Likewise, your gifts to the local church and to our church's larger mission multiply and bring God's love to this town, this state, this country, to the very ends of the earth.

Joy can come from knowing that you receive more than you ever give. When I do ministry, often I receive so much more than I give. And as you do your own forms of lay ministry, you know what I mean, whether it's reaching out in mission trips, teaching a class, volunteering at a social agency, or whatever way that you touch the lives of others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Joy can come from knowing that our worth isn't our net worth. In the secular world we're so often judged by our job title, the names on our clothing, our appearances, or our homes. But we know that our real worth is that given us by God's grace and love, poured out for us. We're each of us a child of God, loved and cared for by God almighty.

Jesus told a story about how we share, or don't share, the gifts that God has given us. Matthew and Luke each tell the story differently, but they are both about how we invest—or fail to invest—what we receive. The Luke passage we heard is a bit hard to follow, because it talks about unpopular kings coming and going. Scholars think that there actually was an unpopular king that Jesus was referring to, and his audience then would say, "Oh, yeah," and today we just say, "huh?" Maybe Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, and he was saying that he wasn't going there to lead a revolution, to become an earthly king, but that he would disappear—die—and that he was challenging his followers to be faithful to him because he would come back as a different kind of Messiah. He wouldn't defeat the Romans, but he would defeat death. But the part of the story we want to lift up today is about the king giving ten servants money to invest when the king would be out of town, and then coming back to ask an accounting. In Matthew, there were three servants, and they were each given a different amount of money, but each received a small fortune. In Luke, ten servants each received a smaller amount than in Matthew, but all received the same amount as one another. The results, in both stories, were the same. The faithful stewards invested wisely and received great returns, and the fearful, distrusting stewards buried their treasures and received no return because they had made no investment. You can almost see Donald Trump telling the stewardship apprentices, "You're fired."

The idea that I want to focus on today is that Jesus is challenging us to invest not just our money but ourselves in

a fruitful and creative way. The word “talents,” traditionally used to describe the money in this story, has a double meaning. It was the name in New Testament times for a valuable coin; but it’s also a name for our own giftedness, our God-given abilities. Our schools have classes for gifted and talented students, but we followers of Jesus Christ know that God has gifted us all, God has given us all talents that help us live loving and creative lives.

Jesus gives us the choice between being a faithful follower or being a fearful and self-protective useless person. We’re invited to invest what God has given us into the work of God in the world. And what’s the work of God in the world? It’s in the Great Commandment. We are who God wants us to be when we love God whole-heartedly, and when we love our neighbors as ourselves. Why? Because God is love. That love is what we are made for, the reason we exist. So God has given us talents, both in terms of earthly treasures and in terms of our own abilities, and has challenged us to invest those talents. We invest ourselves in love when we make commitments to support the ministry of the church. We invest ourselves in love as we teach a group, sing the anthem in the choir or a hymn from the pews, or sing a lullaby to an infant. We invest ourselves in love as we go on a mission trip, and as we carry in our elderly neighbor’s garbage can or fix their fence. We invest in love as we make our marriage vows, and as we struggle to maintain them in times of testing and strain. We invest ourselves in love as we raise our children in faith and teach them through our actions what unconditional love is all about. We invest ourselves in love when we study the Bible and try to apply Christ’s teachings to our lives. We invest ourselves in love when we tell the story to others of how God’s love has changed our lives. We invest ourselves in love when we try and do our jobs and relate to our co-workers in a Christ-like manner. We invest ourselves in love

in prayer, in artistic expression, in care for the environment, in acts of social justice, in moments of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. And when we invest ourselves in love, these investments do not fail. These investments transform the world, they transform the church, and they transform each one of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.