Sermon Starter: Using Our Talents
By Matthew L. Kelley (with minor editing)

I've always been kind of uneasy with the parable of the talents. It seems like the third servant got a raw deal. After all, it's not like the man who went away for a long time gave them specific instructions, he just told the servants to look after the funds. It could be that the other two servants were generally more crafty people than the other one. Or maybe they were a little more educated and had taken Economics 101 while the third guy was out working the fields. Regardless, Jesus has a clear point in telling it: the gifts and graces you posses come from God, and God wishes you to do something with them.

As a pastor I often talk with younger people about the direction they want to take with their lives. They often say things like, "I can't tell if God's calling me to be this or that. I think I have talents for both and do well at a number of things. What should I do?" Our talents and our passions are certainly a major clue to what God wants us to do with our lives. But too often we think of our calling in terms of the destination as opposed to the journey.

The question of how God is calling us to use our gifts and talents is not whether God has decided that we should be a doctor or a lawyer or a teacher, or even a pastor. The question is how would any of these vocations allow us to live out the gifts and graces God has given us? Are these venues the best way for us to live out the type of person God has called us to be? Our calling lies in the journey, of which the destination is a part, but certainly not the whole.

I'd like to think that if the third servant, who wasn't given nearly as many resources as his colleagues, had tried to do something with what he was given and hadn't made the money back, the man would have given him credit for at least giving it a shot.

Sometimes we go forward with our best efforts and best intentions and we fail. Maybe it's because we didn't prepare properly or we didn't fully know what we were doing. Then again, maybe it just wasn't our day. But if Jesus' point in telling this parable is that God wants us to do our best with what God has given us, than the amount (monetary or otherwise) we are

able to produce with it should be a concern secondary to the fact that we gave it our best shot.

If our actions, and more importantly, our hearts, show that we truly recognize and are thankful for our God given gifts, then we won't hesitate to go out and boldly use them to bring hope and healing to a world in need.

Let us pray

O Holy God of Israel,
you faithfully keep the promises
you made to our ancestors
and lead your people into the future,
providing hospitality on the way.
Help us who inherit the pilgrim life
to journey faithfully at your command,
that we may be a band of disciples
called to be sojourners in your service. Amen.