

**Date: November 15, 2020**

**Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30**

**Title: LIFE IS HARD!**

What would it take, for you to make a complete “about face,” a reversal in your choices, ideas or priorities? What if you could see your life, from God’s perspective? That’s the question I keep coming back to, as I think about our lesson, from Matthew’s Gospel today. Today’s passage is about a man who went on a journey, and entrusted his wealth to his servants.

The man obviously represents God, we are the servants, and the wealth, well, we’ll get to that in a minute. But, there are two key words here, that we have to confront, if we’re going to understand this story, and apply it to our lives. The two words are *entrusted* and *afraid*.

You’ll see the word *entrusted* at least three times in these verses. The man entrusted his wealth, to his three servants. He presented them with a big responsibility, and a big opportunity. This man obviously had great faith in his servants. He saw great potential in them, and great opportunities all around them. He saw them as God sees us, great potential, and great opportunities, to excel in the world.

The first and second servants, invested the wealth of their master, as he hoped they would. When the master returned, they presented him with a considerable profit on his money. And the master praised their efforts, and invited them to share in his happiness.

But, the third servant, hid his master’s wealth, and did nothing with it. Why? Because he was afraid. He was afraid of the master. He was afraid of the opportunity. He was afraid of the responsibility. And when the master returned, the third servant dug up the wealth and gave it back to the master. No return on the investment. Just one big lost opportunity. And the master condemned the servant, for letting his fear, override his responsibility.

So, let’s begin here: **The saddest and least productive emotion in life is fear.** That’s the first thing that strikes me in today’s passage. The saddest and least productive emotion is fear. It’s the least fruitful emotion. Fear’s only fruit, is regret and lost opportunities, and an increased focus on one’s self, and one’s security.

The third servant was afraid, and hoarded his master’s money. Why? Because he didn’t trust his master’s character. Just like us, he’d had a few heartbreaks and setbacks in his life. And he no longer trusted the master’s goodness, or the master’s priorities. So, he decided to focus on his own security. Dig a hole in the ground, bury the wealth, and wait for the master to return. No risk, no responsibility. And no reward.

Think of all the things in life we miss out on, because we’re afraid. We don’t trust God’s goodness, and God’s promises. Think of all the opportunities we could harvest with our God-given talents, and opportunities, if we were just bold enough, to base our goals and priorities on God’s promises, instead of on our own security.

Amy Purdy was a typical 19-year-old with a bright future ahead of her, when she came home early from work one day, with what she thought was the flu. She woke up

from a nap. Her hands and feet were numb. And purple. Her blood pressure began falling. She was rushed to the hospital in cardiac arrest. Amy had contracted an often fatal form of meningitis. The nurse attempting to put an IV in her arm announced that Amy had only a few hours to live.

When Amy awoke from a coma, her doctor explained, that they would need to amputate her legs, below the knee, to save her life. Imagine being 19-years-old, and having your life suddenly and radically altered, by something outside your control. Some of you don't have to imagine that scenario. You've lived it. Fear is a natural response, to losing control of your situation.

But Amy faced her new life with determination. She wasn't going to give up. She tried to snowboard again, one of her favorite hobbies, but she couldn't find prosthetic legs, that allowed her to snowboard. So Amy did a lot of research, partnered with the doctor, who provided her with her prosthetic legs, and created new prosthetic legs designed for snowboarding. And she became the first woman, to win a bronze medal in snowboarding, in the Paralympic Games.

Amy Purdy and her husband also founded Adaptive Action Sports, an organization that helps athletes with disabilities, to participate in the sports they love. Amy shares her story at major speaking engagements and even competed on "Dancing with the Stars," allowing her the opportunity to share her story on television.

Amy says that when she lost her legs, she set three new goals for her life: "I'm never going to feel sorry for myself, I am going to snowboard again, and whenever I figure this out, I want to help other people do the same." And she's doing exactly that. Her sports organization helps athletes with disabilities, to reach their full competitive potential. Plus, her best-selling book and speaking engagements, inspire people who face unexpected losses.

Amy Purdy's challenges could have caused her to live the rest of her life in fear, watching out for her own safety and comfort. Instead, she's investing her life, in helping others. She's pursuing opportunities to do good works.

The saddest emotion, and least productive emotion in life, is fear. Amy overcame her fear, and she's having a fruitful life.

**Think how often the scriptures say, "Don't be afraid."** Could it be, the opposite of faith, is not unbelief, but fear? That command, to live without fear, isn't linked to some promise, that nothing bad will ever happen to you. It's not linked to some promise, that God is going to answer your every question, and always work according to your expectations, and your timeline. The command *is* linked, to the promise, that God will be with you, through every challenge.

Let me tell you about another young woman, who found help with her fear. On Palm Sunday 1987, near the end of her church's worship service, this young woman suffered a horrifying brain aneurysm. In the hospital, doctors told the young woman, that they could wait and watch the aneurysm, and hope it didn't get much worse, or they could perform a very risky surgery to remove it. She chose to put her life in God's hands, and have the surgery to remove it.

The young woman experienced moments of overwhelming fear, as she waited for

the day of surgery. One sleepless night, she found the answer to her fear, in a passage from the book of Joshua chapter 1, verse 9. She copied that verse down on a piece of paper. She wrote, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord Your God will be with you, wherever you go.”

She kept it with her and read it every day until she had it memorized. On the day of her surgery, she reluctantly handed the piece of paper, with the Bible verse written on it, over to the OR nurse. The nurse assured her, she would get it back, after surgery. Many hours later, when the young woman awoke from surgery, she found the worn piece of paper, with the verse from Joshua, taped to her palm. What a source of comfort it had become: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord Your God will be with you, wherever you go.”

Think how often the scriptures say, “Don’t be afraid” or, in this case, “Do not be terrified . . .” Fear makes us miserable, but it also robs us, in so many ways, including the possibility for healing, to take place in our bodies.

Remember the example of the three servants. Two of the servants invested their master’s property, which yielded a tidy profit. The other man lost out, because of his fear.

**This story from Matthew’s Gospel, tells us, that Christ is looking for people with holy boldness.** What is holy boldness? It’s the boldness, to let God direct your talents, and energy, toward good works, that brings God glory. God made us, to partner with God, in ushering *in* the kingdom of God. Mind-blowing responsibility. Mind-blowing opportunity. Notice, that the outcome of this story, rests on faith in God’s character, and obedience, to God’s commands. Both faith and obedience require the boldness, to let go of your own security, and comfort, and let God use you, for God’s larger plans.

Robert Young was a successful businessman in Seattle when, on a business trip in New Mexico, he noticed a newspaper headline that read: “Elders Freeze to Death.” The news article detailed the crushing poverty on local Native American reservations, and the horrible living conditions of many elderly Native Americans. Robert couldn’t explain, why the news story grabbed at his heart, but it did.

A few weeks later, when Robert learned of an “Adopt-A-Grandparent” program for Native American elders, he called the number and signed up. Robert was paired with a 78-year-old Native American woman in South Dakota named Katherine Red Feather.

Katherine welcomed Robert into her family, as her newest “grandchild.” In spite of her poverty, her letters to him were full of joy, proudly sharing news of her large family. When Robert asked Katherine if there was anything he could send her, she asked only for a bottle of shampoo, and some aspirin. Robert couldn’t imagine living in such poverty, that shampoo and aspirin were luxury items. He determined to visit Katherine Red Feather and see her living conditions for himself.

Robert and his wife, Anita, were shocked by the poverty they saw on Katherine’s reservation. And he was humbled, by the joy and love, of Katherine and her family. When he returned home, Robert couldn’t find satisfaction in his work. He worried all

the time, if his adopted grandmother was safe and warm, and had all she needed. That summer, Robert, Anita and a handful of friends traveled back to South Dakota to build a house for Katherine. As news of their project spread on the reservation, Katherine's family and friends showed up to help, and they had a big celebration when the home was completed.

Now you would think, Robert could relax, and get back to his ambitious, and successful life! But, God had put a new vision in Robert Young's heart, and he couldn't bury his talent, in self-interested pursuits. After a lot of research and thought, Robert Young, sold his half, of his successful business. He and Anita moved to Bozeman, Montana, and started the Red Feather Development Group, to provide affordable, secure housing to Native Americans.

Remember the two words, I said we had to confront, in order to understand today's passage? *Entrusted* and *afraid*. God has entrusted you with great wealth, your life, your talents, your energy, your intellect, and your influence. God can't use you, for God's glory, if you're afraid of investing your life, in good works for God's glory. So now is the time to ask yourself, what do you want to hear at the end of your life? What will it take to hear God say, "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!"

The Christian life is not for the faint of heart! It's for people willing to live with holy boldness, seeking to be where God wants them to be, and living as God wants them to live. Are you in that role? Why settle for less? Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.