**23 Pentecost, Nov. 16, 2014;** [**Jud 4:1-7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Judges+4%3A1-7&version=NRSV)**,**[**Ps 123**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+123&version=NRSV)**,** [**1 Thess 5:1-11**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+5%3A1-11&version=NRSV)**;**[**Matt 25:14-30**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25%3A14-30&version=NRSV)**; Rev Mary Trainor**

There I was, clinging to a wall fifty feet from the ground. Oh I had a harness strapped to my back, and a rope attached to that - but this was little comfort. I was participating in a leadership course for my old job in New Mexico. Our task was to climb up a very tall wooden climbing wall - next to two other people we did not know. The two other people with me were just the same as me: scared, wanting to belay down way before we reached the goal of the top. But there were a bunch of people cheering us on below us, and so we kept reaching for hand and foot holds, even though they were beyond our reach. We tried not to look down, but every now and then we did look down and it was awful. My legs and my arms shook with fear. I made it almost to the top, and live today to share this story with you. The whole thing lasted only about an hour but oh my, I do remember vividly the terror. What caused the fear? It was all the "what if...." questions going on in my head: "What if the rope breaks? What if my foot slips or my hand slips? What if I bash against the wall?"

Today's Gospel story about the talents is actually about risk taking, about how we handle the "what if's....." Ah, risk taking -- something we like to talk about after the fact, but not something that most people crave to do. We prefer security and comfort. Jesus told this story in the middle of His high risk venture: this was set in the last few days of His life. The parable is about three people who were entrusted with money when their Master went away. The Master symbolizes Jesus, and we are the slaves. The Master going away is about the ascension (when Christ rose to heaven), and the Master coming back is about the 2nd coming of Jesus. The currency, called "Talents," were huge sums of money; one talent was equivalent to 15 years of pay! To even hold one talent was something that none of these three had ever even dreamed of doing, much less to be entrusted with it. The first and second guys took the money, and invested it well! When the master returned, they were both able to give him double his money back. The Master said to both of them, "***Well done, you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."*** Wow -- these are wonderful words, words we each would like to hear Jesus say to us!

The third slave, however, did not invest what the Master had entrusted to him; instead he buried it in the ground. He did not take a risk. The "what if's..." must have consumed his brain so much that he was paralyzed from doing anything other than burying it. This guy was not bad, he was just cautious; he wanted to demonstrate he was trustworthy. When the Master returned, and he returned the one talent to him the Master said, "***You wicked and lazy slave! You ought to have invested my money.***" Whew, this seems so harsh to us -- yet, Jesus is not telling a true story here but is teaching us with an illustration that make us examine how we are putting our talents to use and trusting in God. What do we do with the investment Jesus has entrusted to us? The greatest risk of all, we learned today, is to not risk anything, is to not live fully, is to not put to use all that we have been given by the Lord. The opposite of risk taking is SLOTH: not caring, not living, not rejoicing, not living up to our full potential. [SLOTH is one of the ancient church's "seven deadly sins."] Playing it safe is, it turns out, dangerous; the consequence of sloth is being thrown "***into the outer darkness***." Pastor John Buchanan said about today's Gospel, **"...not to care deeply enough about anything, to invest deeply, to give your heart away and risk everything....**" has dire consequences in the Christian life. We are made to care, to give our hearts away, we are made to live fully. And when we do, we are "***invited into the joy"* of the Lord*.***

It is documented by business analysts that we, in Wisconsin, are "risk-averse." In other words, we only take risks when they aren't really risks. We like security and safety. This is in business, but it makes us wonder if we are like this in our spiritual lives too. God expects us to stick our necks out; the key is to "***trust in the Lord with all your might, lean not on your own understanding***"(Proverbs 3:5-6). We are not going out there without ropes, without a buddy to catch us -- for, as the bible says in Joshua 1:9, "***God is with us wherever we go.***" Sure, we are going to be hanging out there sometimes--but God will catch us. And, we have each other: our 1st Thessalonians reading today said, "***encourage one another and build each other up."*** God trusts us and has invested in us. So, we are to ask ourselves, "**Are we fully investing our talents, or have we buried them because we are fearful of taking a risk? Is this Church using its investments fully, or have we buried what has been entrusted to us?**" What are we being called to do for the Lord that we have not yet done?

Our calling may be just to live out our faith more fully right where we are. There are opportunities right under our noses. Yes, there might be risks involved. I have a friend who is a hair dresser, and she has found a way to serve the Lord fully as she does people's hair. A member of this congregation spends one night in a shelter in Green Bay every week, helping out. A local woman recognized the need for a warming shelter. Oh this is not an easy problem to address. The "what if's..." have stopped others who have tried before, but she pressed on and others joined her. We just got word that in record time, this initiative has been given the green light, the paperwork went through, and this winter to those in need around here will get help. You already are involved in this SAM25 initiative as the leadership of your church voted to provide monetary support from funds we have raised from the Pancake Supper. Volunteer support will be needed. Our representative, Peggy, will keep us informed.

The Gospel tells us that the worst thing is never risking. Security is found in the utterly reliable God who trusts us before we trust ourselves, who risks, and asks that we risk also. As a church, we have been entrusted with this house of God, the responsibility of sharing His love and the Good News of salvation through Jesus. We each have been entrusted with many spiritual gifts. How are we, as individuals and as a church, being called to invest our treasure? Jesus invites you to reach high, to care deeply, to be bold and brave in your service to Him -- and recognize you are well supported: the harness Jesus has you in is infinitely strong and will not fail. Amen.