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 November 13, 2011  
 Matthew 25:14-30

Do you remember as a child when you used to buy school supplies - rubber erasers, number 2 pencils, a fresh spiral notebook? At Casis Elementary School they used to supply a blue plastic box, neatly packed with a ruler, assignment pad, lined paper, and best of all, a brand new yellow cardboard box of Crayola Magic Markers. Red, Blue, Green, Yellow, Black, Purple. Each one flush with dark ink, to slide beautifully on the page, to make marks fine and sharp or with the edge, wide and bold, courageous, definitive. I still feel a profound thrill to think about the potential and promise of that new box of magic markers. You could make anything! By just moving your hand, tiny or sweeping... color flowing out... Rainbows? Rain, Sunshine, Clouds, the Sea, a picture of your family? Your most delicious Fruit. The letters of you name or the name of your friend.

Once upon a time I was teaching Jesus' parable of the talents with kids in Children's Chapel. We acted it out. I had 3 brand new boxes of Crayola markers. I handed one to each of three children. "I'm the teacher, I said, I'm going to go off on a trip and not be back for a long time. I want you to take care of these art supplies for me until I get back, OK?"

Well, with coaching from the assembled crowd of kids, each child performed the appropriate action - the first two using the markers to make things (color, draw, write) and having good work to show to me when I returned.

When it came to the third child, this one was instructed to go to his backyard and take a trowel and dig a hole in the dirt, put the crisp box of markers into the soil, and cover it up with dirt. The cardboard dampened, the decoration on the box faded, each one of those colors getting was getting streaked and dry and disabled for their purpose. We could imagine all of this. The sense of deep dismay among the kids was palpable.

How could anybody do this? Bury a box of markers in the dirt?

How sickening! What a sad, sad, wrong, wrong thing.

Well, the lesson was taking a steep downward slide, and this little boy, who was against his will having to (act out) burying his markers, was looking morose and miserable, I asked the kids, "Why do you think the third slave buried the treasure?"

"He was scared."

"He was sad."

"He thought God was bad."

He was scared. He was sad. He thought God was bad.

This morning I want to think about this third person. "He was scared." That's what the text says: "I was afraid, so I went and hid your talent in the ground."

There is so much to be afraid of, isn't there?

You are afraid of not living up to the trust that your teacher, your parents, Jesus, God, has placed in you. Afraid of taking those markers out of their pristine box and maybe making marks that are ugly. Writing your letters and making some backwards and being ashamed. Afraid of somebody else coming and taking what is valuable away from you. Somebody stronger who threatens you, and runs off, like the bully who steals your lunch every day on the way to school.

He was sad. Maybe he had learned from experience that good things only cause trouble. Maybe he had learned that he didn't deserve anything new or valuable because he was deep down naughty, lazy, wicked.

He thought God was bad. The text says that too: "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed." Maybe he thought God was selfish and jealous and didn't want him to draw wildly with those markers, even to scribble, to doodle, to freely play. Maybe he thought God wanted to be the only important One, and so God wanted him to be seen and not heard. Maybe he thought that if he made a mistake and lost the treasure totally, that God would with massive, superior power, just simply wipe him out.

I think that in our world today there are a lot of people who are scared, who are sad, who think God is bad. Life is not a gift bestowed on them by one who loves them, but some kind of cosmic trick, with odds stacked against them. They are not beloved, wanted children, but beaten down, shamed, illegitimate. They are problems. Because no one really loves them, they have to keep everything to themselves, hoard what they have, keep other people far away. They will not risk, they cannot give.

Sometimes we ourselves are scared, sad, and we think God is bad.

Jesus' strange parable provokes us into considering another amazing possibility: - that God is good. Can you imagine if the world really believed that to be true? God gives treasure to us, to some a lot, but even to the least, gifts of inestimable value: breath, mobility, strength, wisdom, ingenuity, speech, faith, hope, love.

And God gives us freedom - to spend, to hoard, to waste, to invest, to give away, to take risks, even to screw up. To start over, to say you're sorry. If we believed God were good, how would we live differently?

Jesus invites us to faith. Instead of fear. "Come unto me all you who travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Lo I am with you, even to the end of the ages."

Faith - what could that be?

Two antonyms are fear and sadness. (He was scared and he was sad). Synonyms for faith are courage, resilience, hopefulness. Jesus invites us to faith --- that we are beloved children and not orphans. That there is plenty of air in the room for our siblings and our neighbors, for God and for us.

Can you imagine the world if we really believed this were true?

Jesus invites us to take a risk.

Actually Jesus invites us to risk not just once, but to risk as a way of life - to risk losing that treasure, by being too generous, by investing it in ventures that fail or in people who disappoint us. God took a risk when the Word became flesh. Jesus took a risk when he headed to Jerusalem.

The parable is not about investment as competition or as exploitation, about accumulating stuff to prove you are saved. The parable is about risking, investing, using and sharing the gifts and grace of God, to live out of abundance.

What is the church, if church people always had faith that God is good. That God is generous, and what if we stopped being so sad and so scared?

Fear not.

God trusts you.

God loves you even, especially, when you screw up.

Even when enemies come, God spreads a table before you.

The parable shows us what kids know, what everybody knows deep down - that a box of Crayola Magic Markers is not meant to be buried out in the yard in the damp, black dirt.

Carefully, without tearing the cardboard top of the box, the children opened up all three of the boxes of markers. We shared around the fresh sticks of color, yellow, orange, green, purple, black, red. We rolled out a hug roll of butcher paper and began to color, the kids drew portraits of each other, lay on the paper and made outlines of ourselves, rainbows, boats, watermelons, clouds, the sun.

Before our eyes God's treasure expanded, exploded into multiple, infinite, infinitely good images. After we opened of that box of hope and possibility and potential and beauty ... and so we went the way of life, the way of risk and freedom and creativity and love and beauty. And we knew ourselves to be entering the joy of our Master.