May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Today’s Gospel encourages us to remember that we serve a good God and an exciting God, who is always working and always calling us to participate with him in his work. In our language, the word “talents” refers to the gifts and abilities God has given us. That word comes from this parable. However, in Jesus’ day, a “talent” was a unit of weight and by extension a unit of money. It was a lot of money, in fact. Most scholars estimate that a talent was worth 20 years wages. Jesus’ parable says that this master gave one servant 5 talents (~ 3 mln $), another 2 (~1,5 mln $), and the third 1 talent (~750K). So, each received an extravagant amount of money.

**The first thing we learn about God in this story. He is extremely generous!**  Think of how many opportunities have been yours, how many possibilities you have had to explore. Think of all the good and kind people he has brought into your life. Consider how much he has enabled you to learn, and how many challenges he has enabled you to overcome. What experiences you have had! What help you have received in times of need! Think most of all of how he sent his only Son to die and rise again for you, how he has “blessed you with all spiritual blessings in Christ.” He has given us an inheritance that is eternal. Whether he gives you 5 talents, or 2, or 1, his gifts are extravagant and beyond imagination.

I couldn’t even begin to recount God’s blessings to me. From parents and grandparents who loved me and provided generously for me, to good health, to wonderful friends, to a remarkable education marked by some of the best teachers, to a gifted and beautiful wife and two cutesiest children, to the Christian fellowship I have had with people in loving churches, to blessing after blessing after blessing…

**The second lesson I see in this parable is that God wants us to use the lavish resources he gives us by participating with him in his work**. You see, these servants were given these riches for a reason. They were servants and that which the master entrusted to them was for the sake of the master’s business. They were not running their own enterprise — their lives belonged to him and they worked for him. The whole purpose of their lives was to increase his profits, to develop his business, to expand his interests.

The first two servants understood this. In fact, the text says they went off *“at once”* and started using what the master had given them to multiply his investment. I think the point of this part of the parable is that these servants understood their master and his business. They knew he was a man with business savvy, a man who was not afraid to take risks, to put his money to work, to seek out ways of expanding his market share. They knew he was resourceful, creative, imaginative, and courageous. They were especially grateful that he had entrusted them with such great sums of money, which they could use to get more involved in his work. And in the end, the master not only said, “*Well done*.” He also said, “*Enter into the joy of your master.*” Their relationship with him grew and they experienced the joy of closer fellowship in his presence.

This is where the third servant failed — he misjudged his master. He had been given 1 talent and the text says he buried it. Burying money in those days was like putting it in a safe. This servant was trying to protect his master’s assets, to keep from losing any of his money. He chose the conservative route, the safe play. Out of fear of losing it and being rejected by his boss, he hid it in his mattress.

So this third slave was afraid to offend the master, afraid that if he took a risk with his money and lost, that the master would punish him without pity. He did not view his master’s gift as generous, but a burden. He did not think of using it to participate in his master’s work; he was afraid that the master had given it to him as some kind of test, and he was afraid he would fail.

So he did the safest thing he could think of — he hid the money so he wouldn’t lose any of it and have to suffer the embarrassment of being a failure.

Therefore, I think that the third point of this parable is that **many of us have a completely insufficient view of who God is and what he wants from us**. Instead of an extravagant God, who lavishes riches upon us in order that we might enjoy working together with him, we think of him as one, who gives grudgingly and who is ready to punish us when we make a mistake. Instead of a God who entrusts us with his resources and invites us to use them in partnership with him as his coworkers, we think of him as only giving us things to test us. We think of him as cruel and hard, a God who delights in setting us up for failure. We imagine that when we fail or fall short, he is just waiting to condemn us and punish us.

In the parable, the master calls that kind of attitude, *“wicked and lazy.”* I mean, how can we possibly think God is like that? If you read the Bible, and that’s the kind of God you find there, you need to go back and read again. And I would encourage you to keep reading until you hear these words of Jesus:

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

That’s our master! The one with the easy yoke, the light burden. The one who invites us to a place of rest, not fear. The God revealed to us in Scripture is the God of the Apostle Paul, who says we are God’s fellow workers. He has not only forgiven our sins and raised us up to walk in newness of life, but he has entrusted his resources to us and invited us to participate with him as he works in the world to reconcile all creation to himself.

But how will *you* answer the challenge of this parable?

Our extravagant God has entrusted unimaginable riches to you too. Will you heed his call to participate in his work with him, using the gifts he has given you? Or will you continue to believe that God is a hard taskmaster, waiting to pounce on you for the least mistake? Will you take what you think is the safe way, and bury what God has given you?

I encourage you to look at Jesus. His yoke is easy. His burden is light. Amen.