

## Sermon: Building Our Economy with an Ethical Responsibility

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*For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not*

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*scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:14–30)*

It is a great joy to be here, standing in this pulpit, and in this church. On behalf of my wife who has accompanied me, we are grateful to Trinity Wall Street, the rector and staff, and the director of the Trinity Institute, who have invited us to attend and preach the word of God on this fortieth anniversary of the Trinity Conference. It is an honor to be with you, and also to be among such distinguished guests. Accompanying the Archbishop of Canterbury is an honor to me, and also for the Church of Burundi. I bring you greetings, therefore, from Burundi, a small country in Central Africa. I'm sure that some of you when you heard that the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Burundi will be preaching, you started Googling to find where Burundi is. And I'm sure some of you were not able to put it on the map because it is so small that the word “Burundi” has to be written either in Tanzania, or in Democratic Republic of Congo!

Burundi is known most of the times when we have war, or when they're reporting about poverty. It is almost the last country among the poor countries of Africa, and of the world, where they have the highest rate of HIV/AIDS, and other evils of this world. But Burundi is a country of opportunities, as well. Fifty percent of the country's population are young people. It is a country which is mainly agriculture, water, and also has a good climate, though now we talk about the warming of climate, and the change of climate—it is a country which is fertile for investment.

I bring you also greetings from the Anglican Church of Burundi, its six dioceses and six bishops, a church that has enjoyed a partnership with the Episcopal Church in general, and Trinity Wall Street in particular. And this partnership is expressed in many ways, and I want to give the example of the micro credits that we are starting in Burundi, and I think it joins very well with the gospel you have just read: the talents. The talents were in use before I came. I signed a memorandum of

understanding with an organization called “Five Talents” from this country that will be helping women in Burundi, especially the Mothers’ Union, which is an association of women to empower them so that they may make choices about their future, about the quality of life worth living in Burundi. Five Talents takes us to the gospel. And as I know everybody knows, most of the time when we read this parable it is about money, investment, production, and produce from the interests that we have got. But Matthew puts this passage among the other parables that are between the triumphal entry to Jerusalem, which is in chapter 21, and Jesus being anointed at Bethany, in chapter 26. Matthew also reminds us, before he talks about the talents, of the parable of the ten virgins, which brings out the need for wise preparation and readiness for Christ’s second coming.

But as a church, the body of Christ, before we welcome this second coming, Jesus sends us on a mission, to go and transform the world. Between the two events, the followers of Christ are on a mission, and they have to bear fruits, as we have read in Galatians, as Paul wrote to this church. By the freedom we have in Christ, freedom to choose, we are obliged to choose the common good. This parable of the talents is most of the time seen as being about money, an investment, but by extension it can be applied to all God-given abilities, skills, and resources. God has given to everyone abilities of various kinds, and no one is untalented in the kingdom of God. The story encourages us to use our gifts wisely for the common good, reminding us about our accountability before God. The question in this parable is not about how much we invest, but the quality of our investment. What is important about our investment of our resources and abilities and time? Each one may ask, “What do they yield, produce? Do they produce lasting fruits? Results that build dignity of humanity, or just products for consumption?”

This parable also calls upon our human responsibility, individually and collectively. What does it mean to be a Christian in the twenty-first century, to be a follower of Jesus Christ in Burundi, or in America, or in New York? In a world of destitution he is the reconciler of the differences between the world of poverty and that of prosperity, the world of slavery and that of freedom, the world of destitution and that of abundance. Today many countries in Africa, including Burundi, are recovering from many years of war that have left our people with mistrust, fear, and desolation. We hear here and there cries of

people dying of HIV/AIDS. We see children in broken families, lack of education, lack of clean water, many people dying of diseases that can be cured easily.

But Africa, as I said, has also possibilities and opportunities for a better future because we believe that continent is loved by God. It is not a loss, the continent; it is a continent calling to people, "Come and help because we are on a journey together, and a journey of hope." The struggles that we face in our society can only be answered when we join our resources, our gifts, and our abilities to look for answers together.

But I have heard and learned also that even in the rich countries there are problems. Life is dominated by constant competition, by a struggle for success and power where you must succeed, otherwise you might lose your status in society. Those who cannot make it do not belong, and in such a competitive society you either consume, or you are consumed. The whole world, for the un-rich, has become a world that has lost its meaning, and is also without meaningful relationships, compassion, and communion.

But it is in this world that God loved so much that the church of Christ is sent to proclaim the message of transformation, to love and listen deeply, and act compassionately. It is in this world that the church today is also called to be source of unity, peace, and wholeness, where as the psalmist said, "It is lovely, that brothers live together, sisters in unity." Knowing that we have no power of our own to change what exists, our cry to God is "Come, Holy Spirit" to renew and transform, to heal and reconcile. This calling is carried out in faithful obedience to the Father following the will of Christ, and at the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church, local and universal, must find out where God is at work in this world, identify those forces that destroy and distort God's order, and become a liberating instrument of God's love. It does this by building a kingdom of communities that are concerned with justice, peace and reconciliation, and careful creation; communities of prayer and discernment; communities capable of changing social structures and humanizing our relationships.

That is what we should be investing in, and this investment is the service of love, of mending the broken world and healing the fractured communities. God invites us to become his partners. The God who created the world in love calls us to transform the world in love. The God who gave us the gift of freedom asks us to use it to honor and enhance the freedom of others. Life is God's call to responsibility, and

he trusts us with that life. Our responsibility in investing the resources, the skills, and the ability that God gave us is to honor the image of God in other people, to turn the world into a home for the divine presence, and let the invisible heart of God be visible in the world. We are here to make a difference, and make it together. No one should be excluded, but everybody has a place, a seat in the household of God. One day at a time, for as long as it takes to make the world a place of justice, a place of compassion where the lonely are not alone and the poor are not without help, where the cry of the vulnerable is heard and those who are wronged receive justice. Someone else's physical needs are my spiritual obligation. The choice here, as the parable shows us, is not between faith and deeds, for it is by our deeds that we express our faith, and make it real in the life of others and the world.

In this way, the ethical life becomes a celebration and brings joy to everybody, and this joy is the happiness we share, or better still, the happiness we make by sharing. The ethical life is about this sharing of what we have, seeing our possessions less as things we own than as things we hold in trust, and using them to restore the dignity of life until Christ is formed in us, and the good news values become the values of our culture—the values that inform how we spend our time and where we store our treasures, the values that guide our relationships. That is the call that Jesus Christ is making today, to people living here, to people living in Burundi, to people living in Africa, so that we may join together all of what God has given us, and make the difference. So that a mother in a village in Burundi may not die again when giving life. So that a father who has lost everything but has two sons and one daughter may be able to send them to school, and have the future, the hope for his old age. So that these sick people may no longer cry, but have access to medicine because it is available at the health centers that have been built in their villages. So that children who get diseases almost every day because they drink unclean water will be healthy because they have clean water. That's the call. Where do we invest what God has given us? I can be a witness that this call to solidarity has started, and this call to be together is bringing fruits in many homes, but the journey is still long. Let us walk together by using the resources, the gifts, the world that Jesus Christ has given us, that God has created for the common good of humanity.

May the Lord bless you, and bless this conference so that together we walk in the name of Jesus. Amen.

