

“More than the sum of our parts.”

—MATTHEW 25:14-30, CEB

SERMON STARTER



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

“More than the sum of our parts.”

—MATTHEW 25:14-30, CEB



Consider showing this video before the sermon or send out in an email earlier in the week:

<https://youtu.be/uAnxGOA5gyU>



It can be overwhelming to figure out how to help when it feels like the whole world is hurting and you're just one person. But each one of us is so much stronger when we work together as a congregation and in connection with other United Methodist churches.

In practically every corner of the world, The United Methodist Church has been responding to the pandemic crisis, strengthening medical facilities, improving access to vaccines, providing supplies and clean water. This is because a portion of every gift made through the local church is shared to support ministry around the world.

It's amazing what can happen when we experience a new way of living that is not based in an economy of greed or mere survival but on trust and shared resources.

In the parable Jesus told according to Matthew 25:14-30, CEB, the master entrusts valuable coins or talents in the care of three servants. A talent represents 20 years' wages. How is that for extravagant?

Jesus is telling this parable the day before Holy Thursday. There is not a lot of time left. There is a sense of urgency. How will the disciples continue to follow him once the unthinkable happens? What are the risks and sacrifices they will make to live out his teachings? How will they multiply what they have learned exponentially?

Will they receive the gift of extravagant hope from God and share the good news with others? Or will they be frightened that God is angry and self-sabotage their efforts?

Think about how we as a church use our resources to live out extravagant generosity of body, mind and spirit to build up God's kingdom.

During the season of pandemic, perhaps our faith has been tested. And at the same time, many among us recognized our abundance and began to envision new ways to thread those gifts together. While our finances have been challenged like so many other faith communities, our ministries as a community flow and multiply more than any one of us could do on our own.



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

SERMON STARTER

(Preacher, list some of the ministries of your congregation.)

We recognize that God is with us and the Holy Spirit continues to move among us even as circumstances have changed. We continue to make a joyful noise with music and prayers.

When we bring ourselves together in faith, equipped with God's grace, we see that we are so much more than the sum of our parts.

I wonder, for those of you who are holding back, what is it that you are afraid of?

Do you feel too busy?

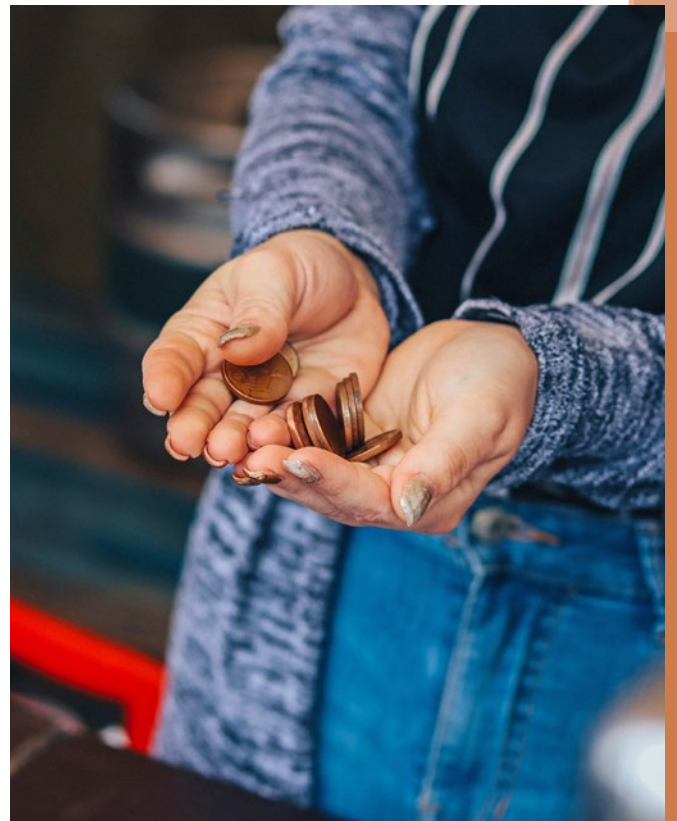
Are you concerned that what you have will not be valued?

Maybe you believe that your gift won't actually make a difference.

Do you resist sacrificing something that you value for the good of the whole?

These are all valid responses particularly when life feels so uncertain. But I want to challenge you to consider what might happen if you surrender. What would it look like to be all in? When you invest what you have, taking risks, trusting that moving through the discomfort and potential mistakes, perhaps you will go farther than you ever imagined. When we join with others in extravagant giving, we see that we are more than the sum of our parts.

Look at this parable. We see that the valuable coins are God's and we have a choice to make. God has entrusted us with something extraordinary. Perhaps what Jesus is saying is that staying in the comfort zone is at best shortsighted and at worst creates a spiritual imbalance that gets in God's way.



Your very being is of sacred worth, divinely created in God's own image and is of more value than any coin. In the words of the old hymn, "Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee." You are a holy and living sacrifice, good and faithful servants!



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

SERMON STARTER

So what would it look like if all (approximate number of people) who are worshipping right now committed to one thing that you will bring to enhance this faith community in the coming year? Recognizing that together as the body of Christ, we are so much more than the sum of our parts, what is possible through our shared abundance?

Start first with the servant commitment and allow that to lead to the financial commitment. Where your heart is, your treasure follows. When you give to the church, it is not a donation or volunteering, but a cooperative investment in community that leads to freedom.

And more than that, the gifts from this church join with those of other United Methodist churches to transform lives around the world. More than the sum of our parts, the impact of 12.6 million United Methodists' giving helps make a difference on a global scale from food ministries, clothing ministries, rebuilding lives, building hospitals and schools, funding scholarships and reaching out to communities.

Together, our gifts as United Methodists support education through funds like the Black College Fund and the Ministerial Fund, bring aid to millions of people in need and support spiritual care for a hurting world. Our offering is one way we can make a difference. Gifts made in the local church are multiplied through The United Methodist Church network.

We see it in our mission partnerships with (pastor, share some specific partnerships from your congregation).

How might the world be transformed as spirit engages with spirit, merging and morphing and pulsing with life and Divine energy that is so much more than we can bring on our own? Together we build up God's realm here and now.

***Together we
build up God's
realm here
and now.***

The servants who multiplied the five valuable coins and the two valuable coins already had started with an unheard-of amount of 125 years' wages and 50 years' wages. And they used what they had and multiplied it to amounts greater than we can even imagine.

Think about that. God's greatest, most extravagant gift to us was the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. When you recognize and live into the gifts God has given you, following Jesus with a rhythm that serves God,



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

SERMON STARTER

neighbor and creation, you open yourself to unimaginable freedom. You open yourself to an existence that is not based in an economy of greed or mere survival but on trust and shared sacred resources.



You open yourself to living in ways that radiate peace, justice, joy and grace that is infectious. Perhaps you simultaneously begin pulling others out of the sunken place where there is, as Jesus mentions, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Good and faithful servants, how will you share this gift of (NAME) United Methodist Church? Who will you tell about something that touched you through this community? And how will you ensure that this faith community will continue to be equipped to share the good news of God's love through Jesus Christ?

I invite you to pray about what you will give to cooperatively join with others and support the ministries of this church and the greater United Methodist Church, even as you consider how you will give of yourself, living into an extravagant tomorrow that is more than you can ask for or imagine.

Thank you for all that you do and for who you are. Thank you for investing the extravagant gifts that God has entrusted you with.



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®