

“Don’t worry, you’re not going to get laid off this year,” Rick said to his employees. I’m sure that there was a huge sigh of relief from 100 people who worried that they were going to be out of a job. Even though he had no travel work for his 100 employees, I learned that the Rick Steves’s travel company did not furlough his employees but instead has continued to pay them. He put his employees to work in a newly created Rick Steves’s Volunteer Corps. His employees have been working at local food banks, cleaning up hiking trails, and making their services available wherever needed in Snohomish County, Washington. ⁱ

What a great idea for a company in the travel sector which has been particularly hard hit this year. Of course, this is an employer who is long established and is fortunate to have the resources to be able to continue to pay his people. He has talents. But his generosity, imagination and resilience led to a great idea to help his employees and help his community in Washington State.

It’s like he took the gift he was given – a talent for inspiring people to travel and arranging for popular tours for them – and used it in a new way: perfect for a year in which we really need some encouraging news. That’s exactly what Jesus is getting at in the parable we heard just now.

Jesus is asking us to use our imaginations, our generosity and our resilience (God-given virtues) in putting to use the talents or money that we’ve been given.

We’re wrapping up the year of Matthew with one more parable...the parable of the talents. But today you didn’t hear the word “talent” when I read this passage. That’s because this time I read from the translation of the Bible called the *Common English Bible*. It’s praised for its plain and clear language. Yes, talent is the word that we are accustomed to hearing in this story but in the CEB it’s called a valuable coin. If you were someone hearing this story for the first time and you didn’t have anyone nearby to tell you that a talent is a Biblical denomination of money then the story will be harder to understand than it needs to be. Did you know that one talent was equal to many years of pay? A talent is a very valuable coin indeed.

Jesus is again talking to the people about money. He does not shy away from this subject. We recently heard Jesus tell a story about paying workers their wages at the end of the day. We remember earlier in this Gospel, when Jesus was shown a coin by the Pharisees, they asked him a question that they thought might fluster him. He simply said *“Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” (Matt. 22:21b)* There was another parable we heard during the summer about a pearl *“When [a man] found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he owned and bought it. (Matt. 13:46)*

And remember when a woman was anointing Jesus with ointment and Judas objected because it was costly and he thought the money should have been spent on food for the poor?

How to keep money, how to spend money and what to spend it on; these are subjects that Jesus dives right into. He knows that we have a lot of anxiety about money, we always have, and what we need is Jesus. He will help us find our generosity, imagination and resilience.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back when things look bleak. It's the capacity to recover when we encounter difficulties. Resilience is certainly a characteristic we all need this year when our world has been very topsy turvy.

Four astronauts will be launched into earth's orbit this evening on a Space X rocket if all goes well with the weather down in Florida. They named their capsule Resilience.

To the astronauts that named the capsule, it's a symbol of what mankind can accomplish in the face of extreme adversity. (and of course, with a lot of money!)

*"And despite [everything] SpaceX and NASA have finished this amazing vehicle that's getting ready to go on its maiden flight to the International Space Station,"*ⁱⁱ

Without resilience and imagination, if we are given a talent or a valuable coin we might bury our gift in the ground.

And then, when life throws us a curveball that we never expected, like a pandemic that has changed so much about how we live and work and travel, if we aren't resilient we will become fearful and perhaps lose sight of the Goodness of God. We may come to feel that God is capricious, harsh, reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not scatter seed. Sometimes bad events pile up one on another in our life and this year in our country has certainly been a tumultuous one.

God is the one who has given us talents; God gives us generosity, imagination and resilience. Paul, in our Thessalonians passage today reminds us of that, *"You are all children of light and children of the day."* 1 Thess. 5:5

[Because of Jesus our Christ] *"We belong to the day."* 1 Thess. 8a

ⁱ Travelandleisure.com, *Rick Steves's Volunteer Corps*, October 30, 2020.

ⁱⁱ Floridatoday.com, *SpaceX Crew capsule Resilience is poised to make history*, Nov 14, 2020.