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Buried No More

This is embarrassing. This happened when I was in high school. Ask my brother and he will tell you how the vein in my forehead popped out. I was fuming. I don't get mad very often. But we are all sinners. I wanted to hold so tightly to it. It was *mine*. I suppose it was one of my most treasured possessions at the time. I still have it. This hat. An orange Sandwich Cross Country winter cap. And, it was a cold day and Peter wanted to wear that hat to keep his head warm. But it was *mine*. What if he lost it, or ruined it? What would I do? Just the thought of loosening my grip on it made me mad. I don't think I let him borrow it.

The truth is the more we accumulate the stronger the temptation is to hold tighter to our things, even as we get more hats, houses, anything in between. The idea of scarcity and the lure of needing to protect is strong. Especially in the wealthiest country in the world. As one put it "You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got your sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you."

We've all thought at one time or another that there isn't enough ____ for me and for them. We tend to see resources through the individualistic lens of scarcity.

Then there is all that is going on. I remember after a particularly traumatic news cycle I was going to stop watching the news for a while. As a news junkie, it didn't last very long. The desire was real. One look out the door and we are tempted to retreat and hide. Lulled by the drumbeat of despair that puts us to sleep we want to protect ourselves. We crave safety. Fear wraps us up so tightly that eventually we are trapped in a cave of our own making where we cannot see the way forward. We cling to what is ours-- and that's all we have energy for.

A talent would be the equivalent of about 1.25 million dollars in today's economy. It's easy to put ourselves in the place of the one who simply puts that talent in the ground. It was a gift after all, and who among us would want to squander a gift. Predictable. Secure. Safe from the elements of this world. It couldn't get lost, misused, or taken advantage of. This person probably thought they were treasuring this gift.

Just at this moment when it seems as though Jesus in this parable of judgment is doubling down on what comes so naturally--- we get what we deserve, we reap what we sow even down to questions of salvation and mercy we must look a few chapters forward for the interpretive key.

When I teach our confirmands the order of gospel processions, I always tell them that the order is *cross, torches, book* because without the light of the cross we do not know how to interpret scripture properly. That holds here. With the shadow of the cross cast over this parable we see that Christ himself is the master who became like a worthless slave. Dying outside the city. The treasure hidden in death. Placed in a tomb. During those three days he was buried he went down to Hades himself where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. And after he defeated death by going toe-to-toe with it he rose again. Now the risen Christ is set loose in the world— not bound by any end.

Through baptism we have been given the fulness of Jesus Christ. The abundant, overflowing, unquantifiable treasure trove of mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God is yours unilaterally. No earning, no book-keeping. No climbing up the spiritual ladder. No comparison to others. The servant-master-savior has given the love of God to you with a reckless lavishness that makes any respectable person nervous because it does not add up. We can only marvel at the gift of it all. You belong. You are a child of God. Before you ever do anything to make yourself worthy and you will be after everything. It has nothing to do with you, only the otherworldly generosity of the giver who is still here giving everything to unreliable sinners. It is embarrassing how free grace really is.

This God who is still saving and creating is your home. Your refuge from one generation to another is not built by human hands or investment portfolios but the living God. All we have comes from God.

We are free. Freed from clinging to our things or our life until they hold us captive. You have died and are alive. Let go. Risk. I cannot tell you exactly what that looks like. By the Spirit you can imagine how this is made real for you. As children of the day, we are tuned outward. There is joy here that is protest against the works of darkness.

Elaine Peirce, her kids went to Grace. Retired and dying of cancer with an empty house in Oak Park. She said when someone knocks at your door you don't build a higher wall (we might add-- or bury our treasure or hide away) but build a longer table. Now, she has asylum seekers formerly living at the 15th district police station living with her. This kind of living only makes sense if we've got nothing left to lose, having died the only death that needs feared, and despite everything, we are here.

Embarrassingly liberating.

