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Many people seem to think that belief in God is just an add-on, an additional practice like exercise, but in reality, it changes our entire way of being.

Over time, we experience a profound healing and start to feel differently about ourselves, about others, about all of existence.

There is thus a great difference between taking seriously the fact that we are a part of God, the source of all being, and thinking that we are primary.

The parable of the talents sounds cruel to someone who sees God as an accessory or who has no God, no higher power, no sense of anything beyond self.

Jesus warns, “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.”

If one believes that the material world is primary, this seems unfair.

It sounds like a version of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

This is because, when we think in terms of the material self, having anything taken away is necessarily a diminishment.

Only when we have a sense of our place within the greater divine do we understand that it is possible to lose something for the sake of the whole, yet gain even more.

There is no real reason to sacrifice for others if they are merely separate from us and no more important than we are.

Either I get the good stuff, or you do, and it might as well be me.

Well, there is one reason—to feel superior.

Some will give up some material capital in order to gain cultural capital, but this is a trade, not a sacrifice, and it not the same as joyful giving for the whole.

I wanted to make that clear before saying that there is actually a metaphorical meaning to the passage.

Jesus is not talking about economics here, but about relationships, about loving God and loving our neighbor, the thing about which he came to educate us.

He teaches us that relationships do not have to be a zero sum game in which either I benefit or you benefit.

We can, if we put aside our egos, our desire to be superior, build one another up, which is spiritual healing.

We can do amazing things together, which is the goal of the church.

I hope that we all are experiencing that here, that we all feel supported in who we are just as God made us, every last bit of our nuttiness, and are able to be a part of the community in ways that speak to us.

If you feel you have not yet found your place here, come and talk to me.

The church is an unwieldy organization of mostly volunteers, but we do not want anyone to slip through the cracks.

Jesus is aware of our profound connectedness.

He knows that the material is only a temporary heuristic device and the more we share ourselves and participate in the great organism that is life, the more joy we experience.

The more we think only of ourselves, on the other hand, the less joy we have.

We isolate ourselves and relegate ourselves to the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now, I imagine some introverts might hear this with trepidation.

You mean I have to be social or be resigned to a weepy gnashy existence?

But introverts need not be worried.

We each share ourselves according to our nature, just as five, two, and one talent were given to people according to their nature, with different outcomes expected from all of them.

(It is not that the one who had five was better. It is just a way of expressing human difference.)

The point is that each acts according to his or her nature.

There are many ways of getting involved in and sharing in the beautiful, sacred organism of which we are all a part.

Some may do so by quiet prayer.

Others do so by running for vestry or going to convention.

It just depends on our own nature.

We are, however, expected to share our talents with others in some way, to be an active part of the whole, even though that activity might be behind the scenes or very quiet.

Some are given the gift of evangelism, which is another word that has been tainted by misuse.

When many think of evangelism, they remember those who wanted to make sure that others thought just like them, or those who seemed to want to put notches in their belts over how many converts they had won.

It can feel unseemly, mostly because it is unseemly.

If the gospel were about convincing people all to think the same way, then Jesus would never have surrounded himself with such varied people.

The disciples normally would not have been seen together as a group.

They were from conflicting sides, as it were.

Jesus knew, however, that we are all one in God, that we are more than such things and can love one another.

It is not our ideas that give us value, but our relationships.

This means that Episcopalians need to learn better ways to do evangelism, to invite people into relationship, into this place where God is palpable, where everyone feels at home, where no one has anything to prove, where all are recognized for being beautiful, nutty children of God, and healing occurs.

The church is, to my knowledge, the only place one can find this kind of affirmation and connection.

Why would we want to keep this to ourselves?

In a world beset by isolation and loneliness, it is all the more imperative that we invite others into the warmth and safety of communion.

That is how we apply our talents.

You may have heard the story of the starfish.

There was a person walking along the shore who came upon thousands of stranded starfish.

Out of the water, they were in danger of dying.

She began to throw them one by one back into the water.

Along came someone else who asked, “Why are you bothering? There are so many.

You cannot save all of them! It doesn’t make a difference.”

As she picked up another starfish and prepared to throw it into the ocean she replied, “It makes a difference to this one.”

We cannot save the world.

Remember this when you read the news.

We can, however, be all the difference in the world to someone by inviting him or her in.

That is the mission of a Christian.

We use our talents to embrace, to affirm, to lift up, to work together, to create a place of healing.