

"Dig it Up!"
by Vince Amlin
Matthew 25:14-29
United Church of Gainesville
July 24, 2011

This is a tale of what I believe is known as "bro-mance", also known in some circles as a "man crush," formerly known as friendship. Or as the hilarious Wikipedia article on "bromance," suggests, "*Bromance* is a portmanteau of the words *bro* or *brother* and *romance*. A **bromance** is a close but non-sexual relationship between two (or more) men, a form of homosocial intimacy." My own is a tale of friendship that was not to be, a friendship that never really got off the ground, a tragic "bromance," if you will, involving myself and a guy I'll call Mike.

Mike and I first hung out about a year before Rachele and I left Chicago. We were in a weekly small group together which met at the apartment that Mike and his girlfriend shared. I was immediately drawn to Mike as someone who seemed funny and cool, someone with whom I could be friends. I thought this is someone I really like. I don't know about you, but for me that feeling is a rare gift. Not that I don't like most people; I do. There are lots of people I enjoy and with whom I am friendly; and I have lots of great friendships which have developed with people whom I wasn't immediately bonded to. But those few times in my life when I've met someone with whom I've experienced that exciting spark of soul connection are memorable moments. Do you remember how that feels, to suddenly be so certain: this person is my friend? That was how I felt when I first got to know Mike, and it was clear he felt the same way, clear that this could really be a new friendship, that perhaps he would even be a new best friend.

But then our small group ended, and there was no longer an easy excuse to hang out. We saw each other at church and joked around a bit; we ended up at some of the same parties, but neither of us ever risked taking the next step, and our budding friendship died on the vine. At his birthday party, a month or so before I moved to Florida, Mike said how sorry he was I was moving to Florida, how few good friends he really had, and how he had been hoping we could be friends. In admitting his feelings he may have even used the phrase "man crush" since it's always easier to make a joke of such things, but I could tell we both regretted the opportunity we'd squandered, this amazing chance for a new friendship that we'd wasted.

As I've gotten older, I've often had the sense that the barriers to true friendship were multiplying. It's just not as easy as it was at age ten to become someone's friend. At least for me. Some of that is societal. I don't know how it is for women, but for many men telling someone you want to be their friend, or even just inviting them to do something can be seen as strange or suspicious. I know how uncomfortable it was for me just to write this sermon and preach it to you. We just aren't used to talking about our feelings toward our friends. And some of the problem is logistical. With significant others, children, jobs, there just doesn't seem to be enough time for friendship in adulthood. But there is another part of the problem that is personal, connected primarily, I suspect to fear, a fear of rejection, a fear that when we put ourselves out there, the other person might not have a friend crush on us, a fear that we won't be good enough,

or cool enough, or know enough about hockey, or comic books, or craft beer, or scrapbooking, or whatever makes our friends so wonderful.

It was all so much easier as kids. I never worried as a kid what my friends would think if they came over and the house was a mess. In fact, I remember having that exact fight with my parents. Yet, this week, as the shuttle driver for Gainesville Honda drove me home to wait while they worked on my car, I started apologizing several blocks away that I hadn't mown my lawn. As a kid I never stressed about finding the right balance between dressy and casual clothes when hanging out with my friends. I wore sweat pants exclusively through the 4th grade, and if Nolan North hadn't started wearing jeans in 5th, I'd still be wearing them today! I never worried then that, while my friends *seemed* to enjoy hanging out with me they were secretly thinking I wasn't cool enough, or rich enough, or talented enough. It was all a lot easier then. But like that third servant in our scripture today, I've gradually become convinced that life is a harsh master, reaping where it does not sow and gathering where it does not scatter. I have become convinced that it is all together safer to bury my single talent in the ground than to risk it in the open market.

At first glance our scripture today may seem like some ancient capitalist fable, a lesson about the power of compound interest. A talent, was an ancient form of money, equivalent to 15 years' wages for a day laborer. Reading it literally, it seems to contradict the many scriptures that speak against the accumulation of wealth: do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth; the love of money is the root of all evil; it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle...The last verse that Mary read seems especially awful and confusing in this light. "To 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? I've always hated that part. In light of our recent economic collapse the parable's economics seems suspect at best. With these kind of payouts, there must be a Ponzi scheme somewhere. There's definitely some subprime lending going on here, and if this is a story about money, the third servant's actions seem fairly reasonable to me. But of course, this story isn't about money. It is about life. In this parable, Jesus is saying it is those who spend their lives who earn a double portion. And those who bury their talents in the ground for fear, lose what little they had.

This story is not about the talents earned but about the talents spent. The story is not about our successes or failures but about how we understand God, how we understand life. Do we live our lives from an attitude of fear, burying our dreams in case we might fail, biding our time until it seems safe to dream, to love, to live? Or do we risk such love, such life, such dreams as we have been given on the only bet there is to make, on the only investment we're offered- this life, this moment, this place, these people? Have you ever been to an arcade that made you turn in your money for tokens? It's a brilliant business strategy because you can always decide to keep your last quarter, but if it's a token, what else are you going to do with it? It's only good at that arcade, and you've got to spend it. We've been given a cup full of tokens, and this life is the only arcade in town.

This parable does share something with our recent economic meltdown; it is a parable of recklessness, which ought to make us a little nervous. Because the faith that this story encourages, the lives it encourages are not cautious, are not safe, are not careful. It encourages us to be profligate with our lives, extravagant in the way we throw

our love around, spendthrift with our dreams. It calls us to open ourselves to rejection, to failure, and to success, and acceptance, and relationship, which are at least as dangerous. Its lesson is the same I learned when I realized I had wasted my chance for a new friendship: the gifts of life are meant to be spent. It's the same lesson that Annie Dillard teaches about writing. She says, "One of the few things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book, or for another book; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes."¹

Where are you holding back perfectly good love that could be spent on those around you? What life have you buried deep in your heart, for fear it would be lost? What risk, what chance, what investment in life are you being called to make? Perhaps you don't have a problem reaching out to new friends, admitting your "bromance" or "womance." But what is it for you? What have you buried? What do you fear? Perhaps you've been holding back from your dream of taking singing lessons, because you were told you couldn't carry a tune. Perhaps you've been putting off sending out your résumé to find more fulfilling work because you're not sure you're good enough or you don't deserve it. Perhaps you have some idea that seems just crazy enough to work but a little too crazy to actually try. Perhaps you have some social issue or injustice which is burning inside you, but which you've tamped down because you feel you are powerless to address it. The lesson of this parable is: dig it up, spend it, live it, do it, now.

It may not succeed. That double portion doesn't always come back to us in the form in which we had hoped it would. Your fears may turn out to be well founded; you may never achieve what you had hoped for from your life, but you will have more than when it lay buried in your soul. If you spend it, live it, do it now you may find a new friend, a new talent, a new job, or renewed meaning in the friends, and talents, and job you have. Or not. If you spend it, live it, do it now, you may lose some or all you have, but if you stow it, delay it, bury it, you will find yourself with nothing left to lose. This is the only arcade in town, there is nowhere else to go and spend the lives we've been given, so let's spend them now, on each other, letting one another in, risking that intimate, holy connection. And we will be blessed in the spending, the risking, the living. We will receive that double portion.

In a moment I'm going to teach you a Spanish-language folk song that tells the story of this parable again, and we'll sing it together, but I want to translate it for you now. Roughly, the song says, When God comes to ask you about the talent you've been given, what will you say? Dig it up, dig it up, unearth the talent that Christ gave you. Multiply it, multiply it, multiply it. Sanctify it, bless it, bless it. Dig it up, multiply it, bless it, now. Amen.

¹ Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. Harper & Row Publishers, Inc. 1989. p. 78