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Along with anticipating turkey and dressing and pumpkin pie this week for Thanksgiving, I've noticed Christmas decorations beginning to light up yards and homes. Soon the TV will be filled with Christmas movies, getting us into the mood for the holiday season.

Although I don't recall seeing in recent years the movie *The Man in the Santa Claus Suit*, it tells the charming story of a man who rents Santa Claus suits to three people struggling with difficulties. Through wearing the Santa Claus suit, their lives change as they discover blessings with the people around them.

The mysterious man who rents each suit is played by Fred Astaire, best known for his dancing skills in many movies. Although he doesn't dance in this particular movie, how many of you have enjoyed watching him dance in other movies?

We all know how well Fred Astaire could dance, but

according to Hollywood folklore, a screen test report on Astaire for RKO Radio Pictures, now lost along with the test, is reported to have read:

"Can't sing. Can't act. Balding. Can dance a little."¹

What if Astaire had taken that comment seriously and decided to never dance again? Many would never have experienced his amazing talent of dancing, and countless movies may not have been created.

Sometimes a negative comment can stop us in our tracks, leading us to bury our talents. In my imagination, I wonder if such a comment prompted the man in Jesus' parable to bury his money rather than investing like the other two recipients of money.

In the story Jesus told, a man was preparing to leave on an extended journey. He gave differing sums of money to three trusted people. Two of the people doubled their money, possibly through investments or using it to create a profitable business, while the third one buried the money in the ground to keep it safe.

When the traveler returned home, the two who doubled their investments receive praise and

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became business partners, while the third who buried the money, lost everything and received a look of disappointment.

We often think of this parable as a story about using our money wisely, and many stewardship sermons have used this as an illustration. But there's another meaning to this story as well, for the parable uses the Greek word **τάλαντον** [tal-an-ton], which translates in many Bibles as the word "talent." You might even hear how the words sound similar...talanton, talent.

The Greek word meant a balance or scale or unit of weight often used to measure an amount of money. Eventually the word came to represent a particular sum of money, which some suggest equaled about 15 years' worth of wages in Jesus' day. It was the largest silver coin of its day, weighing over 43 grams.

When you think of our modern usage of the word *talent*, what comes to your mind?

I've often wondered how the word *talent*, which represented a sum of money in Jesus' day, became associated today with skills and gifts.

Maybe it's because people with skills and creativity often make money. They used their creative talents to make financial talents. If you have a product that others want to purchase or a skill that others want to observe, one's talent can lead to wealth as people pay for your products or services.

That's risky, though isn't it? What if someone doesn't like your skill? What if critics speak unkind words about your creativity? It might feel safer to bury the talent, avoiding future criticism and critique.

Imagine a sailor of a small boat who encounters a fog and can't see a nearby buoy, the floating device that rings a bell or shines a light to mark the way through the water. If fog prevents the sailor from seeing the buoy marking the direction to take, a wise sailor turns the boat rapidly in small circles, knowing that the waves produced from this action

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will rock a nearby buoy. The sailor stops and listens, repeating the procedure until the waves make the buoy ring its bell. The sailor discerns a direction only by making waves. It may be risky to venture into the waters and make waves. One could remain safely in the harbor instead, but without some risk, the boat would never go anywhere.²

Jesus' parable suggests, however, that taking a risk in using our talents, whether skills or financial, can result in more blessings. Rather than hiding our talents, what if we offered thanks and used them to make the world a better place?

In addition to giving thanks this week for food, health, family, what if we offered thanks for talents—not just the financial ones, but creativity and skills?

Let's start with the talents that exist within each of us. Think of one talent you possess. Something

creative within you. Maybe you're hesitant to pursue that talent. Or maybe you enjoy it regularly.

Do you have one in mind? On the count of three, say "thanks, God, for (and name your talent). 1...2...3.

Talents also lie within our congregation as a whole, creative resources that emerge from the body of Christ, our congregation. What are some things we do well as a congregation?...

Whether you dance or paint, make music or cook food, clean the house or our church or mow the lawn, organize money and budgets, care for your children or grandchildren, tend a garden or shop for Christmas gifts, give thanks. Although it may feel risky, use the talents God has given you, and give thanks for God's many blessings.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Astaire

² Adapted from *LectionAid*, Vol. 4 No. 4, 1996, p. 35