Sermon Note: Play It Safe
Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction
This Sunday, we'll hear a parable Jesus told his disciples near the end of his ministry. Three servants were trusted with their master's money. Two put it to work, and one buried it because he was afraid. God invites us into the joy of belonging—to God and to one another. When we're afraid, that joy can be hard to experience, and protecting what we have can seem like the safest response.

Illustration Video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG59BAQcAQo
In this clip from *Frozen* (2013), Elsa's family seeks help from the trolls for Anna as Elsa's powers grow stronger…

Why This Video?
Elsa's family goes to the trolls for help. The troll Grand Pabbie heals her sister Anna and then warns Elsa that fear will be her enemy. Elsa's father (the King) decides to keep Elsa's powers hidden from everyone, even Anna, and to close the gates, which seems like a choice made in fear. When we're afraid for someone we love, the safest plan can seem like the only one, and often the people closest to us can bear the cost.

Video Discussion Questions
1. When have you wanted to protect someone you love? What helped you decide what to do?
2. Grand Pabbie tells Elsa there is beauty in her magic and also great danger. What do you think Elsa hears in these words? What do you notice about her response?
3. Grand Pabbie says, "Fear will be your enemy." What do you think that means? What do you notice about how Elsa's father responds to him?
4. The King says Elsa's powers will be kept hidden, even from Anna. What do you think he hopes to accomplish? What questions do you have about his decision?
5. At the end of the scene, Anna sees Elsa close the door to her new room. What do you notice about Anna? What do you think being separated might mean for Elsa and Anna?
6. What can we learn from the King's choice about decisions made in fear? When you're concerned for someone you love, how can you care for their relationships and joy as well as their safety?

Matthew 25:14-30 (CEB)
14"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was leaving on a trip. He called his servants and handed
his possessions over to them. 15To one he gave five valuable coins, and to another he gave two, and
to another he gave one. He gave to each servant according to that servant's ability. Then he left on
his journey.

[16]"After the man left, the servant who had five valuable coins took them and went to work doing business with them. He gained five more. [17]In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. [18]But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

[19]"Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. [20]The one who had received five valuable coins came forward with five additional coins. He said, 'Master, you gave me five valuable coins. Look, I've gained five more.'

[21]"His master replied, 'Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.'

[22]"The second servant also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I've gained two more.'

[23]"His master replied, 'Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.'

[24]"Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, 'Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven't sown. You gather crops where you haven't spread seed. [25]So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what's yours.'

[26]"His master replied, 'You evil and lazy servant! You knew that I harvest grain where I haven't sown and that I gather crops where I haven't spread seed? [27]In that case, you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. [28]Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins. [29]Those who have much will receive more, and they will have more than they need. But as for those who don't have much, even the little bit they have will be taken away from them. [30]Now take the worthless servant and throw him out into the farthest darkness.'

"People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.

Scripture Study Questions

1. What are your first impressions of this parable? Which interpretations may make you uncomfortable or seem confusing to you?
2. What questions come to mind as you read the passage? Is there a word or phrase you would like to explore further? How could you go further?
3. The master entrusted five valuable coins to one servant, two to another, and one to a third (v15). What do you think of the three servants' responses and their conversations with the master about the responsibility they were given?
4. The third servant said, "So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground" (v25). How do you understand his decision in light of what he said about the master?
5. The master said to the first two servants, "Come, celebrate with me" (v21, 23). Who do you think the master is, and what joy was he inviting them into? How does knowing the master's character shape that joy?

6. The CEB translates the Greek word *talantas* as "valuable coins" (v15). Think about this parable in light of the way we use the word "talents" today, to mean skills or abilities. Does that change your interpretation? If so, how?

Weekly Action

Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes so I can examine the wonders of your Instruction!" Ask God to open your eyes to this parable, then read it out loud. Think of one choice you face where it's hard to act, or to experience joy, because you're afraid. What do you think God might be saying to you about that choice? Choose one action you can take in response. Then share it with a trusted spiritual partner or a loved one.

Prayer

God of all that is good, we confess that there are times when we do not trust the right one with our hearts, efforts, attention, or money. Forgive us, we pray, for burying our talents or wasting our time on that which does not bring honor to you. Free us for joyful obedience, that we might awaken to your purposes in our lives, bringing you glory and honor. In Christ's name, whose return we await, we pray, Amen.

This content was developed by Rev. Bob Rhodes using source materials from Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church, his own original writing, and AI tools in alignment with La Jolla UMC AI Usage Guidelines. AI assisted with drafting and iterative refinement. All final text was reviewed and approved by Rev. Rhodes.