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Like most of you of my generation, when I was young, in high school and in college, I was sooo in to rock and roll... I bet y'all wonder where this is going... No, I bought in to the energy and the electricity of the irreverent genre that was born of the blues and jazz and swing, now electrified and amplified... there was no way to ignore it... Rock and roll came about after the tragedy of World war II, 70 million dead, after the great depression, the polio epidemic and the invention of birth control... It was born of an exponentially changing world... It was a genre that spoke with incisive honesty and, at times, with ecstatic, visceral passion... These artists were the prophets of a generation speaking loud, and often irreverently of love and loss... of peace in a world addicted to violence... They spoke of a just world... they spoke out against the status quo, the so-called establishment, and the isolation engendered in a world racked by power gone wrong and greed... decrying the way of things; calling out the powers that be... At its heart it called for change... change and transformation, which always occurs in the presence of love, which always occurs in the presence of the Spirit of truth... Rock and roll... bashing with drums and bass and electrified melody the way we've always done it... singing of a new order of mutuality, and new enlightened awareness, of social reversal, of patriarchy... the prophets of rock and roll prophesied a revolution. Indeed society itself in the sixties was calling for a radical reordering... a society seeking to make sense of a dangerous and unjust world in the most violent century in human history.

One of my favorite bands back in the day was the Who... John Entwistle's thunderous bass, a drummer unlike any other on steroids (actually he was on a lot more than that) raw, piercing vocals... and a slashing lead guitar... (I've always wanted to write for *Rolling Stone*) Pete Townshend the lead guitarist once said in an interview when asked about the purpose and ethos of rock and roll... He said that rock and roll "gives us a sword to cut the head off of the problem:" I've always loved that... The problem being, for lack of a better way to say it, the nihilist dispossession of the post-modern world. And that brings me to the Gospel of Matthew.

There is a problem in Matthew's world... a problem not unlike the problem of our own age... and for Matthew the sword to cut the head off of the problem is the good news of Jesus of Nazareth... the good news told in rhetorical form... rhetoric being the artistic means to influence people... to move them towards enlightenment... to change their minds... and to move them to enlightened action... all of the gospels are rhetoric, that is they are all meant to stop us in our tracks... to exhort, encourage, empower people to a way of life... to repentance, that is, to turn around and look at reality, to see the world as it really is and as it is

meant to be...to change their hearts and minds... The loud cutting edge of the gospels, and Matthew is no exception, is the parable... the parable a two edged sword, often irreverent, and disturbing... pleading for change... Rhetoric, the rock and roll of literary art.

This is a well known parable, the so-called parable of the talents.... Remember parables are stories using elements of our common life, sometimes allegorical, but always their intention is to move us into a way of thinking, a way of life... and parables always have a twist... what appears to be an obvious interpretation serves only to draw us deeper into the heart of an improbable message... more often than not, the message is not what one would expect... but there is always a visceral edge to the parable that leaves the listener moved, moved from customary understanding into new and more profound awareness... This parable today is a case in point.... On the surface the teaching is clear, consistent with Matthew's theme: that we must be awake and prepared for God's realm breaking into our world... and being prepared means that we are about the means of the kingdom, bearing fruit, Matthew's metaphor for enacting the good... so on the surface this parable teaches us to bear fruit, to be diligent in the life of faith... this is good Jewish teaching... to exercise Torah, the law, which at its heart is to love one's neighbor, which is the time honored means in all religions to order society until the final consummation of heaven and earth... there is nothing new in that... with that the scribes and Pharisees would surely agree.... But the other edge of the sword gives this parable its visceral and emotional edge.... Many interpreters explain the parable this way... The master who entrusts his slaves with his wealth is God... the ones who multiply it are considered faithful; the one slave who hides his talent and doesn't increase it is thrown into the outer darkness. Right?.... But every listener would bristle at the idea of the absentee master... the absentee master, much like the landowners and vassals of the empire, in league with the powers that be... who only want more and more wealth... and the twist here is that the one slave calls the master out: You reaped where you did not sow, and gathered where you did not scatter... Matthew is playing on the people's anger towards the empire in this parable.... He is naming the problem that his society is up against... that those who have much, much will be given them... and for those who have little, even what they have will be taken away.... That is not the kingdom of God.... In the kingdom of God all will have enough... no one will live in the dark.... So this again is a story about what the kingdom is not.

Matthew is naming the problem, the problem since time immemorial... that wealth and power are disproportionately held by the elite few... that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer... We're seeing the same thing in our world today... Thomas Pickety in his groundbreaking book *Capital* argues that the rise of the middle class in the west is really an anomaly, that in the modern world, the forces

of economics, namely unbridled capitalism, have moved the wealth of the planet increasingly into the hands of the elite few.... And with the Citizens United ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States which gives corporations the same political rights as individual citizens, the gap between the powerful and the disempowered will only grow greater... The way our society is headed is not the kingdom of God...because those who have much will receive more... and those who have little will see the little they have taken away.

Matthew is wielding the sword of revolution, no less. He is calling out the corrupt way of the world and is giving us the means of cutting the head off of the problem....the way of Christ is the revolutionary means... the means of change, the means of love, the means of the Spirit... What he is telling us is that if we are not disturbed by the dispossession of our world... if we are not disturbed by the disparity of power and wealth, the abounding injustice and violence all around us then we are asleep and blind to God's purposes.... Dear friends, Our lives of faith, bearing compassion and mercy and justice and nonviolence on behalf of our neighbor, is meant to turn our world upside down... we are as Christians called to be revolutionaries, as sharp as a sword and incisive as to the truth... As people of faith we can no longer ignore the abject need of the lost of our world.... At our baptisms we are named revolutionaries.... Sword bearers.... And as ever it is time for a change... It's time to rock and roll.