Read: Luke 19:11-28

"Sir, here is your pound. I put it away safely in a piece of linen because I was afraid of you" - everything is just as you left it with me, the pound has been ever so carefully looked after ("safely in a piece of linen"), "here is your pound", you have it back, and all is well, no harm done.....?

The master is, we are told, very much less than well pleased, simply to be given his bright and shiny pound back; "You wicked servant", we hear. As Jesus tells the story, the servant tries to justify his position and gain some sympathy by saying, rather self-pityingly, that he was afraid of his master, describing him as "exacting" and adding descriptively (and it might sound to us rather provocatively) that his master is one who 'reaps where he has not sown', i.e. is one who expects to get something for nothing, who is ever ready to benefit from someone else's expense.

But why did the servant just preserve the pound, rather than do something useful with it, if he was genuinely afraid that the master would be expecting something (or even more than 'something') back? It doesn't obviously make sense. The master very reasonably asks why the servant didn't at least go to the minimal trouble of putting the money in the bank to gain interest on it. Furthermore, in his generosity to the more loyal servants he shows himself to be anything but a mean and grasping employer. The plea of 'fear' is feeble nonsense.

In making the accusation to the master that "You pick what you have not put down and reap what you have not sown", isn't this just a projection of exactly what the servant is like? Isn't it that the servant is comfortably bone idle in his master's service, expecting something (a quiet and undisturbed life in the master's household?) for nothing, but he gets his comeuppance when "even what he has" is then taken away.

The "man of noble birth" who would go "to a distant country to be appointed king and afterwards return" is, of course, Jesus himself. Getting "near to Jerusalem", he knows he is about to die, but will rise and ascend to the Father to be crowned king. The people "imagined that the kingdom of God was going to show itself then and there", but with the story that Jesus tells he is saying to them (and to us) that there is work to be done in his service before that happens. He will be seriously unimpressed if, when he comes, we his servants simply try to give the precious pounds/talents/gifts back to him, however well preserved they might be.

To what extent am I prone to choosing a quiet and undisturbed life in the master's household (the Church), and not putting myself out to serve him actively, making full use of the pounds/talents/gifts he has entrusted to me for His purposes in preparation for the coming of his kingdom?