Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University not too long ago had a series of what they called "last lectures." The university invited professors to come in and give a lecture as if it were their last. Apparently a number of professors had given imaginative, moving lectures. But while they may have been memorable, one in particular stands out, the lecture given by Professor Randy Pausch in September of 2007.

Dr. Pausch's lecture was unique in that for him, it really was a last lecture, as he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and was told he would have three to six months of good health. By the time he died in July of 2008, his lecture was viewed and seen by millions around the world, and his memorial service was broadcast on the ABC News web site. His message was simple but beautiful: have fun, dream big, make the most of life, and live for others.

His story is remarkable because from an early age, he had big dreams, but throughout life, he kept hitting obstacles. He wanted to get into graphic engineering on computers, but had a hard time getting into the company he wanted to work for. He also had a hard time getting his teaching position. In a sense, it seemed that despite his intelligence, he kept hitting a brick wall. But in his words, "the brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. Because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people." And over his life, he learned how to scale those walls pretty well. He refused to take no for an answer and got the job he dreamed of, and in his lecture he speaks of how much fun he had doing it. But what is so remarkable about him is that his lecture wasn't just about how to achieve your dreams. He posed his audience with a question that he asked himself: "how can I enable the childhood reams of others." And so he ended up becoming a professor and passing on his knowledge to countless others. His story and his question are quite fitting, for they tie in quite well with our Gospel, because they have to do with overcoming obstacles and also remind us of how we are to be motivated by love.

Most of us haven't had to deal with a life-threatening disease, but at so many points in our life, we will have to deal with fear. While Dr. Pausch I'm sure must have had some fear when he was diagnosed with cancer, what is also striking about his lecture is how at other points in his life, fear could have certainly kept control of him. Fear of getting fired for sticking his head out for a student he trusted in; fear of not getting into a graduate program; fear of having to confront the dean so he could time away to do a job he had dreamed of doing. Throughout his talk, he confronts situations where he could easily have backed down and played it safe so he would have the security of a job and a paycheck. But he didn't do that. He had dreams he wanted to achieve, and did them. But beyond that, he wasn't just motivated to achieve what he wanted, he was motivated to help others. And ultimately that is what has to motivate us too, and Jesus reminds us of that.

Our Gospel can be a bit hard to hear at first, because it certainly seems that the master is unduly harsh on the servant who is given money and in turn buries it. The other two put their gifts given to them by the master to work, while the other, perhaps watching a bit too much of CNBC and seeing market trends, decides to bury what he has been given. It seems that while he may be overly cautious, he has done nothing wrong. He did not steal

the money or squander it; he simply returned what he was given. So what is the problem? The problem is at the end of our life, we do not want to stand before Christ and, when asked to give an account of our life, reply "I did no harm to anyone." Sometimes we can be very motivated by fear, and do our best to "keep the rules," such as fulfilling a Sunday obligation by coming to Mass. But we are not in this world to play it safe. We have to work constantly to make the most of our time while on earth, because as Saint Paul reminds us in that second reading, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night." And the way we make the most of our time is by taking a page from the professor, and from the two good stewards, and have a life that is motivated by love for one another our of service.

To do that, first we have to find our gifts. It is easy to compare ourselves with others, but as Dr. Pausch says, "we cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand." His childhood dreams were being in zero gravity, playing in the NFL and meeting Captain Kirk. He lacked the perfect eyesight to be an astronaut, the athletic talent to play professional football, and how could some middle-class kid meet a TV star? but he still chased after these dreams. He got to lead a class to NASA and got to float in zero gravity. He met William Shatner as an adult when he came to check out his virtual reality project for a book he was working on on Star Trek technology. He didn't play in the NFL, but played football in high school and worked hard and gained life experience. And in his words, "experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted." Because of football, he was able to learn other things like the value of hard work, sportsmanship and teamwork. The stewards in our Gospel may not have the business savvy of the master, but they realize they do have something that the master sees in them. They just have to find it and unlock their potential, and use what they have been given to do great things, which they do. Even though the servant who buries his talent just has been given something seemingly, even he has something to give. All of you do as well, the key is to just find it and not compare yourself to others and reflect what you lack, but to use what God has given you.

But that is not the end of the story. It might be were we at a sales rally, start-of-the year pep talk at Delano High School, or a business conference, but we are at Church. You've just come off a retreat where we've reflected on being a light to the world, and that is what you need to use your gifts to be. Just as Dr. Paush asked himself how he could help others realize their dreams, you have to ask yourself how you can help others realize their destiny of being a saint in heaven. To do that means to live a life in love, and to make yourselves vulnerable and to take chances. You can go to all the retreats you want, come to Mass every Sunday, and pray every night, but ultimately if you aren't living out what you are given you are burying what God has given you. All of us are called to love both ourselves and one another. C.S. Lewis once wrote "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements, lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable....the only place outside haven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell." As I've preached on before, love can be a difficult thing for a lot of us, because you may have been hurt by that word

deeply by someone who said they loved you but never backed up that word by actions. Or maybe you have used that word in the wrong way to someone you care about, and feel bad about doing so. Maybe you are tempted to play it safe, but if you keep your faith bottled up, what good will it do the world? In the halls of high school, in the cubicle next to you at work, and even in your families are people who are hurting, and who desperately need to see the light of Christ. By building relationships with them, by getting to know them, or by even inviting them to come to Church with you, you can make a difference in their lives. It doesn't mean that you walk up to them and say "do you want to know about Jesus," but it means through the testament of your lives you help them to come to know Him. And beyond building relationships, you can live out your faith in service, as a number of you have done through being involved in our parish by volunteering, serving as a catechist, and using what you've given to make both Saint Joseph's and Saint Peter's shine. So many of you have done great things for people, but you have to remember that even if you are using what God has given you, that doesn't mean that you ever reach the finish line this side of heaven. The first two servants show the master how much they have earned, but they didn't then get to go on vacation. Instead, because of what they did, even greater responsibilities were given them, as the master says "to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough." Every day of your lives, put before yourselves the question of what you can do to help one another, because people's needs never fade. Neither should our love for them. You very well may have your initial efforts not be successful, or you may set out to do some good and have it blow up in your face. That happens to everyone, but when it does, we apologize, we pick ourselves up, and we go out and try to do things better. God doesn't mind screw-ups; look at who He chose to follow Him. The wicked servant didn't screw up though, because he didn't even try.

At the beginning of my homily, I quoted Dr. Pausch who spoke of brick walls in our lives being there to give us a chance to show us how badly we want something. If you think of a brick wall, you can't see what is on the other side of it. The presence of sin in our world has created a pretty big wall in our lives between us and God, but Christ, through His Incarnation, death and Resurrection, has given us a rope to scale the wall to get back to Eden and be in paradise. There is so much greatness in this world. Christ in a sense tore down the wall of separation between us and God, but this isn't heaven, and we've still got a wall to scale. So many though never realize that, and instead of learning to climb up, simply build up what they perceive to be paradise in this world. It's up to you to show the world where true happiness lies. Each of you has been given the talent on how to use the rope to climb the wall of life to the Kingdom of Heaven. Do that over the course of your lives by using all the talents God has given you. Sometimes the fruits of your labor may take a lifetime or more to be apparent, but never forget what a difference you make by shining brightly in a world that can be at times so dark. Because when you do, I think you'll be surprised at just how many people were able to scale the wall to heaven simply because you were willing to use what you were given with them to help them find their way home.