

Sunday 15th November 2020 (Trinity 23) – **Are we ready?** Fr. Mike

Collect

O God, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness: **Be ready**, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy church; and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

- Zephaniah 1.7,12-18
- Psalm 90.1-8
- 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11
- Matthew 25.14-30 (The Parable of the Talents)

Background

This parable is unique to Matthew. It is not so much a 'let's keep the doors of the church open' parable as a 'best we get ready for Jesus' coming' parable.

The prophet Zephaniah puts it bluntly: **"The great day of the Lord is near... and hasteth fast"**(v14).

When you hear the word 'talent' today, the most usual reaction is to think of a special ability or gift, such as a musical talent. In the time of Jesus, a talent had nothing to do with ability. It was simply a measure of weight, and later on became a measure of money.

Matthew was writing this (at the end of the first century) at a time when the church was struggling with the fact that Jesus had not returned as promised. His Second Coming (Parousia) seemed to be like that delayed train that is repeatedly promised 'shortly to arrive on platform 4' and of which although we remain expectant, there is no significant sign of progress! In the short term, this is probably for the best, given that as the Psalmist reminds us today (notwithstanding the Lord 'has been our dwelling place in all generations') **"thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance"** (v7) - so at this moment we might not be *quite* ready for the promised return of Jesus?

Do we really want the Lord to **'cometh as a thief in the night'** as Paul disturbingly reminds us, to find his servants woefully unprepared?

The early church was reminded that they were entrusted with the great treasure of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that they will be held to account for their level of stewardship of this gospel when Jesus returns. 2002 years later, as Jesus remains frustratingly absent, this original message still stands and therefore holds significance for us today - Namely the ultimate destiny of a professed servant of Christ...NOW - **'and straightway took his journey'** (v.15).

Walking away is always the hardest step – and it demonstrates the greatest trust. Parents, teachers, guardians and indeed anyone with a responsibility of nurture all experience this dilemma. Jesus left his friends, trusting in their response once the break was made. No longer could decisions be made on their behalf. No longer could there be any last-minute guidance to avoid major mistakes, and no practical or spiritual mopping up of disasters.

We are left with a question of life and death:

Q/What has the Lord given us to invest, which corresponds with the talents given to the servants in the parable?

Each servant who responded to the best of their ability was treated in the following four ways:

1. With fair and equal treatment – **'to every man according to his several ability'** (v15)
2. Complimentary – **"well done, good and faithful servant"**
3. Increases their responsibility **"thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things"**

4. Tells them (and by implication, us) what to expect at the Second Coming - we as Christians will also be invited to **“enter thou into the joy of thy lord”**

Current COVID 19 challenges tease out the messages of this parable

The current pandemic has brought out the best and the worst in human nature, both as individuals and as a nation. Many have, and continue to surprise and irritate in equal measure. Some ‘pull their weight’, as it were, while others simply do not. Sometimes this is down to ability, or intelligence, or integrity, or primarily a matter of attitude. Crisis tests everyone. It was ever thus of course...

The one-talent servant did the bare minimum and acted only in fear. There was no affection for the master. His only concern was for his own security. For this lazy **‘unprofitable’** approach to life, the reward for **‘slothful’** behaviour is to be banished **“into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (v30).

A ship in harbour is safe. But that is not what a ship is for. So also a silent Christian is safe, but this is not what Christians are for. We might further reflect upon the fact that if you were a ship in Pearl Harbour during the well-documented Japanese air attack of WW2 you were not really all that safe, as history showed... and this parable demonstrates that silent Christians are not really safe after all.

The other servants made the best of their opportunities, and were rewarded for their tenacity.

Conclusions

[This 'Parable of Talents' emphasises that Judgement and Grace are both part of God's plan.](#)

God will certainly hold us accountable for what we have done, or failed to do. He will also forgive our trespasses...

[Service, not retirement, is the goal of Christian stewardship.](#)

We have been entrusted with the Holy Gospel. Good News from our God who risked the life of his own precious son to benefit all humanity. We are expected to be ready (whatever our age or ability) and to show the same sacrificial spirit by using the opportunities that come our way (no matter how great or small they may be) to proclaim that Gospel by our actions. Even if this means facing danger to achieve it.

[The greater our faith, the less our fear](#)

A wise man once remarked that the sign of an educated mind is the ability to entertain opposing opinions. The ability to keep an open mind and to *appreciate the truth on both sides* is therefore key, and that is what is needed here as servants of the gospel. Before, during and long after COVID 19.

Meanwhile, we are advised and encouraged to simply look after one another unconditionally, or as Paul eloquently puts it by graciously giving us the benefit of doubt:

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

(v11). So having been entrusted with stewardship of the Holy Gospel we are charged to invest in it sincerely - because if we do not, our very Salvation is at stake.

Fr. Mike.