

St Swithun's Church Family

2 before Advent

Sunday 15th November 2020

The Parable of the Talents

A stack of approximately ten gold coins, slightly worn and discolored, is positioned in the center of the text. The coins are stacked vertically, with the top coin showing a distinct profile of a figure. The stack is set against a plain white background, casting a soft shadow to the left.

*Please use this booklet to **worship with us** – ideally at 10am on Sunday so that we know we are joining our prayers together but any time is good. Use a candle and a cross if you can find them to give your worship a focus.*

The children might like to use the Sunday school resources provided by Izzy.

This is a Service of The Word. It doesn't matter if you are one person or a family together – use the booklet and go through the words – stop and reflect as you need to. We are going to record this service again and add it to the website www.saintswithuns.org.uk There are various prayer resources and other things to look at on the website – if you have any feedback or anything to share please let me know.

Giving - if you usually give your collection on a Sunday morning in cash, and you are able to, please put this aside each week to bring to church when you are next able to. Even better would be to set up your giving online ('Saint Swithun's PCC' ; 60-05-11 ; 16126718 ; NatWest Bank) if you haven't already done this.

You might like to enhance your worship by singing or listening to a hymn or a song at various points – I have a few suggestions below – you tube is a great resource...

Gloria – clap clap

https://youtu.be/ahrP4Xh_I0k

All are welcome

<https://youtu.be/js8RtT0mJpc>

Praise my soul the king of heaven

<https://youtu.be/blpf8rSJtn4>

Amazing Grace

<https://youtu.be/maeSHVZX8xc>

Love divine all loves excelling

<https://youtu.be/sw5ZCZeS32M>

Introduction

Today is second Sunday before Advent and our reading is the Parable of the Talents. Rev Frances is preaching for us today and encourages us to think afresh about this very familiar parable. As we come to worship together in Spirit may we have open eyes, open hearts and open minds.

The Gathering

The Greeting

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you

Opening Prayer

**We arise today
through a mighty strength:
God's power to guide us,
God's might to uphold us,
God's eyes to watch over us;
God's ear to hear us,
God's word to give us speech,
God's hand to guard us,
God's way to lie before us,
God's shield to shelter us,
God's welcome to secure us.**



Adapted St. Bridget.

Saying sorry - prayers of penitence

As we prepare to say sorry to God let us take a moment of quiet to recall our behaviour, our relationships, our attitude over the past few days – what do we need to repent of? What have we ignored or stayed silent on that we should say sorry for?

Loving God, our maker and our redeemer,
this is your world and we are your people:
come among us and save us.

We have seen the ill-treatment of others
and have not gone to their aid;
Lord in your mercy

Lord in your mercy

We have condoned evil and dishonesty
and failed to strive for justice;
Christ in your mercy

Christ in your mercy

We have not loved you with all our heart,
nor our neighbours as ourselves;
Lord in your mercy

Lord in your mercy

We know that God forgives us when we say sorry

We are forgiven

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us
from our sins,
heal and strengthen us
by the Spirit,
and raise us to new life
in the risen Christ.
Amen.



Glory to God

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to all people on earth.

Find a way to rejoice knowing that God loves us and makes us whole. Maybe you could have a quick dance to your favourite tune, tell a funny joke, shut your eyes and feel God's loving embrace warming you, picture a place where you feel one with God.



Today we will sing a Gloria which the children sing so well in Church. We suggest making as merry a noise as you are able to. Find something to shake / bang or just clap along...

Gloria (clap, clap), Gloria (clap, clap), in excelsis Deo X2

**Lord God, heavenly King,
peace you bring to us;
we worship you we give you thanks,
we sing our song of praise.**

Gloria (clap, clap), Gloria (clap, clap), in excelsis Deo X2

**Jesus, Saviour of all,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away our sins, O Lord,
have mercy on us all.**

Gloria (clap, clap), Gloria (clap, clap), in excelsis Deo X2

**At the Fathers right hand,
Lord receive our Prayer,
for you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord.**

Gloria (clap, clap), Gloria (clap, clap), in excelsis Deo X2

**Glory, Father and Son,
Glory Holy Spirit,
to you we raise our hands up high,
we glorify your name.**

Gloria (clap, clap), Gloria (clap, clap), in excelsis Deo X2

The Collect

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy, restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

The Liturgy of the Word

Let every word be the fruit of action and reflection.
Reflection alone without action
or tending towards it is mere theory,
adding its weight when we are overloaded with it already ...
Action alone without reflection is being busy pointlessly.
Honour the Word eternal
and speak to make a new world possible.

adapted Helder Camara, Brazil

**May we be open to the Word eternal,
May we look with wonder and child-like awe,
May we be open to reflect, and inspired to action.
Amen.**



OPEN MIND, OPEN HEART

The Gospel Reading

Matthew 25.14-30

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew
Glory to you, O Lord.

‘For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, “Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, “Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon *Rev Frances*

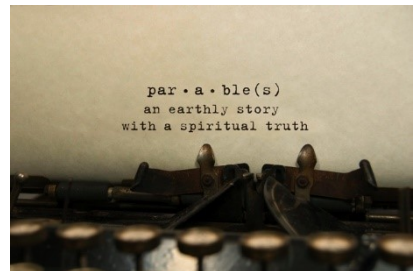
Perhaps this parable is well known to you; perhaps you haven't heard it for some time. If you hadn't heard it before, or were reading it someone to whom it was new, you might ask two questions: which servant do you identify with most; and, do you like the Master?

Most of us have heard a sermon on this passage where the emphasis has been on using our gifts, or talents well - indeed, I've preached one. The conventional interpretation is along the lines that what matters isn't whether we have more or less than others, but that we make the most of what we do have. The servant with one bag of gold would have been commended as fulsomely as the other two servants, had he doubled his investment as they did and produced two bags of gold.

Traditionally, The Master is understood as representing God and the servants as members of his church, entrusted with doing his will. The message is taken to mean that, like the Master, God will reward us if we take risks to serve him generously and will punish us if we hide our gifts. This is the gist of the usual reading of the parable, though with varying understandings on how literal such consequences will be.

Jesus told parables - simple stories to illustrate moral or spiritual truths - in order to get his hearers to think more deeply; to interrogate the truth in ways that are more creative and far reaching than a mere list of instructions would be likely to do.

Parables help release us from polarised thinking; from making black and white judgments - who, after all, are we to admire or condemn in the parable of the Prodigal Son; of the parable of the lost sheep? They rather reveal glimpses of God's Kingdom, intimations of ultimate truth; and such insights may come about through provoking further questions. Rather than expecting them to show us 'the truth', or there being only one way to read them, it is perhaps more helpful to think of parables as opening up an open-ended dialogue. I



wonder whether the usual way we understand the parable of the talents is the best one in pointing to what the Kingdom of God is like?

One difficulty with the parable is that it appears to commend usury - the investment of money in order to earn interest. In Jesus' time, the Jewish community's list of the seven most despised professions included usurers - they were denied all civil and religious rights. Yet if we read the landowner as God, then God praises the first two servants for doubling their investment and condemns the third servant for not putting his money on deposit, where it would earn interest. In Jesus' time, the word for talent specifically refers to a sum of money, rather than describing a gift or aptitude, as the word has come to be understood. This calls into question the whole idea that this is a parable about us being the best we can be, with the implications that we can control our fortunes, and 'earn' God's approval and that the poor are to a large extent responsible for their misfortunes. The Master does not refute the accusation from the third servant that he is a hard man who reaps where he does not sow and gathers where he has not scattered - in other words profits from others' labours. He declares that 'For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.' This is in effect saying 'The rich get richer and the poor get poorer' - and while this may be no more than a description of the way the world works, it cannot be a state of affairs Jesus commends.' If we approach the parable less literally and more symbolically, nonetheless its apparent commendation of usury,



profit, wealth and punishment seem strange, given the centrality of Jesus' teaching - encapsulated in the Beatitudes, that blessed are the poor, the gentle, the merciful and those who seek justice;

and the call to show compassion and mercy indiscriminately, supremely illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Of particular significance is where in the Gospels this parable appears (there is also a version in Luke 19 the parable of the pounds). In Matthew, it is immediately followed by the prophecy of the Last Judgment, and the account of the sheep and the goats. This tells us that when the Son of Man comes, the criteria for judgment will not be how religious we were, what we believed, or how rich or powerful we were: instead, we will be judged on whether we showed compassion to others, particularly the most despised, poor and vulnerable - for our ministry (or lack of it) was to Christ himself; 'When I was hungry you gave me food, when thirsty, you gave me drink.....when in prison you visited me.' The third servant in both Matthew's and Luke's parable is thrown into the outer darkness and abandoned; in contrast the account of the sheep and the goats encapsulates a Kingdom of God for those that loved neighbour - clothed, fed, sheltered, protected - without expecting reward, and unaware of the identity of the one to whom they ministered. In the parables of the talents and the pounds, the master's behaviour towards the third servant - casting him into outer darkness - seems to belong to a world far from God's Kingdom, where unconditional giving and receiving of love is the litmus test for membership.

Luke's parable of the pounds is broadly similar to that of the talents, and like it, the context is striking. It appears immediately after the account of Zacchaeus the tax collector, who, drawn to Jesus, hides in a tree in order to see him. Zacchaeus belongs to a despised group of Jewish citizens who were employed by the Romans to collect taxes from their own people and who were notorious for extortion, greed and deceit. He is transformed by the encounter with Jesus and vows to make amends to all those he has defrauded. His recognition of the need to make restitution to those who have been wronged is followed by the account of the parable of the pounds, in which the King shows no contrition at being a hard man who takes others' profits for himself, and later kills those who opposed him. The third servant is condemned to death for speaking the truth. Jesus tells this

parable just before mounting the donkey on his way to Jerusalem and his Passion. One writer, the theologian Brian McLaren, sees a parallel: like the just servant, Jesus is sentenced to death by the authorities he constantly resisted and 'one possible interpretation...is that if we become a conscientious objector and confront an abusive system, like the just servant and Jesus himself, we will risk the Cross.'

Although this reading of our Gospel is unconventional, it has become more popular in recent years. The more usual interpretation seems to see the parable as a call to Christian faithfulness and trust. Jesus, so it is believed here, requires a commitment and willingness to venture all, which the third servant is not able to meet; the cost of following Christ is to risk all for the Kingdom and not let its realisation come to nothing through timidity and fear about the future. Yet when the disciples allow fear to overpower them, Jesus' behaviour is in complete contrast to the Master of today's parable. Peter denies Christ three times - and is not only forgiven but given authority to lead the church.

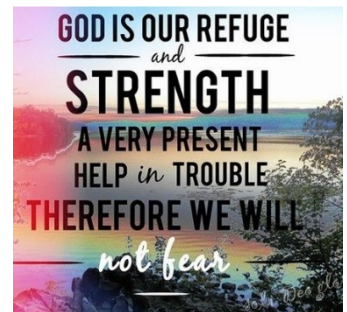
All the disciples desert Jesus at his hour of greatest need.

Thomas refuses to believe that Jesus has risen until he is given proof; and far from being condemned for his doubts, Jesus appears to him. In contrast, the third servant is put to death for failing to carry through what he is asked. On the other hand, the rich man who longs to follow Jesus but holds back is not condemned; instead Jesus acknowledges how hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, 'but with God, nothing is impossible.'

What are we to do with these truths that seem irreconcilable; beliefs or actions that appear to negate other, equally powerful views? Perhaps it may help if we acknowledge that we cannot be granted certainty, and that it is unlikely Jesus told parables so that we could reach 'one size fits all conclusions'. Rather, such parables are about deepening our experience of the risen Christ through wrestling with them and letting them speak to us in all our vulnerability. The temptation is to self-censure. To return to the question at the beginning, most, or many people, dislike the master and identify with the third servant, but think they shouldn't,

because the master is seen as representing God. Yet if Christianity is 'good news'; if God is the God of unconditional love revealed in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we can approach him as we are, with all our doubts and questions. And a very good question, it seems to me is, where is God in this parable - with the powerful ruler? With the condemned servant?

In our own context, in the wake of the continuing pandemic, we should also be willing to give voice to difficult questions, if we have them. Authority, after all, is not the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong. For example, though there are valid arguments for and against the decision to close places of worship during the current lockdown calls, I believe, for vigilance, given the potential future implications of such a law. As with the different views in the Bible that cry out to be listened to, so with the many voices which speak into our lives at the moment: voices that tell of suffering, of compassion; of isolation; of hope - truths which need to be heard and honoured. Whether we wrestle with uncertainty, or whether we rest in a secure hope; can we seek to trust in the God of love revealed in Jesus? Can we, in all our vulnerability and incompleteness, commit to the God who will in the end be there for us, whether we wait with a faith that shines brightly, or in dark vulnerability: the God who is present in the night of unknowing and despair as in the light of consolation. Amen.



Profession of Faith

Our faith holds us all – whoever we are, however we come to God: **We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.
We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.
We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers

Let us pray:

Loving God, we pray for our world as we overcome this pandemic, for all those who are living in places which feel dangerous, those places which have inadequate healthcare resources, places where people are trapped in poverty. In a moment of quiet we remember the places and people that need our prayers and our action...

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

Loving God, may we remember that we are all made in your image and we remember that we are united in prayer. We pray especially for our Saint Swithun's Church family and hold in our hearts those who particularly need our prayers and our action...

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

Loving God, by your indwelling presence make our hearts and our homes places of peace. We pray for those in our community who are working in healthcare at this time, especially remembering those who are working in Lewisham Hospital, and those working in care homes and sheltered accommodation in our parish. In a moment of quiet we remember any people who need our prayers and our action...

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

Loving God, in you we live and move and have our being – we pray for all those who are affected by pain and sickness, those who are anxious and depressed, those who are grieving and lost, those who are suffering in isolation: especially we remember *Gwen, Marshall, Susan, Cherine, Karen, Paulette, Maureen and family, Pamela, Neil, Debbie, Elaine and family, Clinton, Francis, Cynthia, Diane, Harold, Ivy, Sean, Taneisha, Talabi, Susan, Sydney, Edith, Vanda, Lorna, Ena and Stephen*

In a moment of quiet we remember anyone who needs our prayers and our action...

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done

Loving God, in you we live and move and have our being – if we abide in you and you in us, we are already in the fulness of that life which is eternal. We rejoice in your presence, and pray for those who have gone before us – Eleshia, Florence and David. In a moment of quiet we remember those we have loved and see no more on earth...

Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord

And let light perpetual shine upon them

Merciful Father

Accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Prayer Jesus taught us

Rejoicing in God's new creation, we pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

The Peace

God is love
and those who live in love
live in God
and God lives in them.

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

Who could you share God's peace with?

*Spend some time planning
a deliberate act of peace.*

Dismissal and Blessing

The Blessing

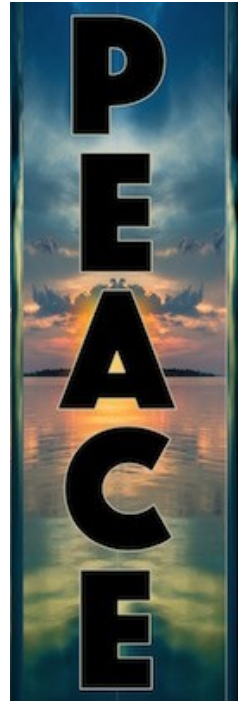
Good and gracious God,
Grant us open eyes, open hearts and open
minds, that in God's power we may live and work to God's glory;
and the blessing of God,
Creator, Redeemer and Spirit
Be with us all, now and always
Amen.

The Dismissal

We go from here blessed for the journey that lies before us,
and strengthened for the challenges we may yet face.

Let us go in peace
to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ
Amen**



Happy Birthday to Olivia!



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