

## **The Parable of the Talents    Matt 25.14-30    08.11.2020**

The readings we had last week and those for today are all about what we call the end time. Eschatology is the theological word for it. It is what concerns the end times, the end of the world, the final day of judgement, when the secrets of our hearts will be revealed, the second coming of Christ. 'Your coming we await' we will pray soon in the Great Thanksgiving. As last week the message of this parable is 'be prepared', 'be awake', 'live as children of God'. Be brave. Be found working with what you have been given."

For Christians in the early church, this was a message of absolute urgency, as we hear implied in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, they believed that Christ's return was imminent. But as we know we are still waiting. Most of us don't give it much of a thought that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, so we should be ready and prepared to meet our maker and be the best we can be as faithful servants of the gospel. To be honest we don't feel the urgency.

Yet for our time, there may be another reason to be found hard at work, to remain alert, to avoid burying our gifts in a field while we wait for our master's return. We live in a world of incredibly fast change, truly mind-blowing issues about how we as a world govern ourselves, climate change, how we deal as a world with pandemic, with violence, greed and avarice. The state of the USA is a matter of deep concern for all of us. Well, we might say What's new? Isn't this always been the state of the world? And yet in our time I think we are more concerned than ever about the future not so much for ourselves but for our children and future generations. I know I am!

How are we the church responding to the needs of our ever changing world? What worked in building our faith communities 30 years ago, 10 years ago, and even only last year may not work today. When I go to Synods it feels like in fact the church seems to be more into maintenance and survival, to managing decline rather than addressing the great issues of our world and how we as Christians go about building a world as we believe God's love would have it be. More and more people walk past our doors and don't see the answer to their yearnings in what they see and experience of the church. And yet as I see it human beings are increasingly interested indeed desperate for meaning, value and purpose, what we might call spirituality, increasingly looking

for what we know Jesus was and is all about, but they don't look to the established churches for solutions to their questions.

We struggle as a church to imagine what future church will look like. Rather than taking bold risks for the sake of the Kingdom, we opt for what seems safe and secure while wringing our hands anxiously about our future survival. We bury our talent out of fear for what change might mean.

The landscapes of this country and the greater world are in rapid transition, and as a church both locally and nationally, we cannot remain as we were and expect to be accessible and open to such a radically changing world. We have a gospel to proclaim and we may be being called to risk all for the sake of our faith. Risking all. What might that mean for us here at St Luke's as we ponder our future?

Prevalent in Jesus' parable today is the fascinating conversation between the master and the slave who hid his master's talent in the ground. It is, in so many ways, a discourse for our times, a study of our struggle as a church in transition: "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."

In a world of change, it may well be that God is in the business of reaping where we least expect the Spirit to have sown, gathering where Christianity's seed was apparently not scattered. Today's Gospel is an invitation for us to look outside of our stayed, historical boundaries at a world where God, at times like an opportunist, is harvesting spiritual abundance in the most unlikely places. And you know I see it happening here in our city, yes to some extent in some bold church initiatives, but oh so much more in folk who are challenging the principalities and powers and discovering new insights, deep and profound energy. When I go and touch base with some of these folk I find a deep underlying spirituality which while not being overtly Christian or any other religion, is oh so on the same journey with similar aspirations and hopes for our world and for how we treat each other. Often I am the only one there with a clerical collar, because me thinks we are all too absorbed in our own church agendas, desperate to hang on to what we've got.

But when we act boldly, when we invest our talents and our resources, our gifts, and our abilities for the sake of the kingdom, the parable assures us that God will embrace us and say to us. 'Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will

put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your Lord.' And to be honest this parable is not about success or survival it is about trust and faithfulness in the living God, and being committed to live our lives in God's presence.

We live in a land which is increasingly unchurched, and this invitation can, in fact, be a declaration of our mission. We can no longer expect to harvest where Christianity once sowed. Our newest members, and our most abundant resources to grow as the Body of Christ, may be found amongst those who have never before darkened the door of the church, amongst those who have never even considered the Christian faith viable, but who are being moved to live out what we would call a gospel of love for our neighbour and a celebration of all that is worthy in life.

Our greatest temptation is to be like the bad slave, to be afraid of being bold enough to try something new; to be scared of investing our gifts given to us not simply for ourselves, but for a world in need.

I'm talking about the whole church, indeed our diocese and in particular about us at St Luke's. How do we engage for the sake of the Gospel of good news. Investing our talents our resources, it seems, means far from hiding them, but carrying our gifts for ministry into the most unlikely fields of mission -- sinking our resources into endeavours that we might not have imagined yesterday; of getting "outside the box" of our normal way of being and doing as a community in Christ and of really throwing our doors open wide; but not only so that people can walk in, but so that we can walk out into a changed world with the message of the Gospel. What might that mean for St Luke's in the City?

What must await us there is the promise of the parable, that some of us will double, and perhaps even more than double, our investment as we participate with God in the practice of reaping where we did not sow, and gathering where we did not ever scatter.

And what also awaits us there is precisely what we seek in the deepest places of our hearts, the one thing we know that will conquer our fears of change, our fears of trying something new. For if God is anything at all like the master in today's parable, when we walk out into the world, we are going to meet God's Spirit there, waiting for us; and not just to settle our accounts, but to invite us into the joy of an abundant life that Christ is preparing for all Creation