

Morning Praise @ Home 19th November 2023

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen *cf Psalm 51*

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Reading **Matthew 25: 14 – 30**

Reflection from Philip

Call me old fashioned, but *I* always knew the parable we just heard as ‘The Parable of the Talents’ rather than the NIV translation ‘Parable of the bags of gold’.

In the time of Jesus, the Talent was a unit of currency, worth about 6,000 denarii. A denarius was the usual payment for a day’s labour. At one denarius per day, a single talent was, therefore, worth about 20 years of labour. (Well, according to Google, so it must be true!!!) Anyhow, it was a serious amount of money to invest – or to just bury in the ground.

But apart from the accuracy of using an actual historical unit of currency, I prefer the name ‘Talents’ as the word happens to have another meaning to us today – Talents as in gifts, or skills – and these are what this parable is all about.

God has given us all gifts – do we use them? Do we recognize them as gifts from God? Are our lives as happy and fulfilled as they would be if we were using them properly?

Some people, like that final servant in the parable, fear using their talents or gifts. They are afraid of failure. They don’t want to disappoint. So, they just bury their gifts. They seek happiness, but they don’t understand why they can’t find it.

I think we all know people who perhaps have not fulfilled their potential. They don’t tend to be very happy. They feel frustrated. They can be quite grumpy! If we are honest, I’m sure we can all look in the mirror and recognise areas where we have not done what we could.

Old school reports would be a good place to start – these are actual quotes: ‘*Philip scatters his possessions like the Autumn leaves!*’ I was only 9! Haven’t changed much though. Or much worse – ‘*Philip may fail his A-level Economics due to idleness!*’ Well, I was a bit – but I actually got a ‘B’ grade – so there!

This parable reminds us that God will be coming back to settle our accounts. This needn’t be something to fear. In the parable, as the master rewards the faithful servants, he says, ‘Come and share your master’s happiness!’ That happiness is the focus of what God wants for us now.

I heard a powerful talk on this by a lady called Joyce Meyer, I want to share some of what I heard with you.

We will only ever be happy if we are doing what God wants us to do – and doing it to the best of our ability. God doesn’t want us to worry about everybody else! We keep worrying about everybody else! Our job is to keep doing what’s right until the master comes back – and it is that which is the secret to living happy and fulfilled lives.

So, what are you doing with your gifts and talents? I ask this of myself too. Just sitting in church on a Sunday? Not doing anything to make other peoples' lives better? No time for helping or encouraging anyone else? Are you not using your God-given gifts and talents? If that is the case, then you have just buried those talents the master gave you. It will not be good for you when the master returns... and in the meantime, you will be fearful and frustrated.

You will never be happy if all you do is think about yourself. We need to start paying attention to what we need to do to make others happy.

The servant who buried the talents didn't understand God. He convinced himself that in burying the talents, he was playing safe. That didn't work out well!

We don't have to be afraid, if we fail, that's alright. It happens! God Understands. He knows us. But we must try. If we fail, we just need to get up and try again!

I Corinthians 16: 13 tells us **Be strong in Faith** and Ephesians 5: 2 tells us – **Walk in Love**. That just about sums up all we need to do. Be strong in faith and walk in love.

Jesus gave us a simple message in this parable: use the gifts and talents that you have been given by God. The Holy Spirit, understanding, and the abilities he has given us – use **these things** to grow in our spiritual lives as Christians – and to help others.

Psalms 37 says **don't worry about evil**. Don't worry about everyone else. Trust in the Lord and do your best. I was a scout leader for many years. The current scout promise says it well:

I promise to do my best to be kind and helpful and to love our world. I promise to do my best to be kind and helpful and to act with love towards everyone.

The master took the talents that had been buried by the servant and gave them to the servant who had earned the best return. Seem unfair? That's missing the point. If you do not use the gifts that you have been given, they will be taken away. The message is use them or lose them!

We are all so different. Thank goodness for that! We all have very different gifts and God calls us to do very different things. Importantly, God always gives us everything we need to do what he has called us to do - Philippians 4:19 *'God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus'*.

About gifts – we need to remember who gave them to us and why. Some of us can be tempted to think we are – well, that we are 'God's gift' to certain things. We need to be humble.

About 2 months ago, Ruth Abbott and I were attending a service at Blackburn Cathedral to mark the beginning of the academic year for Emmanuel Theological College, where we are both studying. There were several hundred people there, mostly training to become lay readers or vicars. All chomping at the bit to get on and apply their abilities and skills for the Lord's work.

The Dean gave the welcoming address to us all. But he didn't exactly say what we were expecting to hear. 'God doesn't **need** you!' he declared. An awkward pause. 'God doesn't need you – Our God is so powerful; He created the heavens and the earth! He doesn't **need** your help. But... he **wants** you!' He knows what is best for us. He knows that when we use the **gifts** he has given us, to do **His** calling, then we can share in his master's happiness. **Amen**

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession led by Edwina

In our prayers today, we reflect particularly on the tragic events unfolding in Israel & Palestine: we continue to pray for Ukraine.

Loving and living Lord, you are the Light that the darkness can never conquer.

Pour your Light into the darkness of despair, the pain, the agony and the grief.

Pour your Light into the confusion of our leaders at home, so that they may see new strategies & possibilities.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Dear Lord, you are the Love that casts out fear.

Pour your Love into the hearts & minds of the bereaved, and those frightened from the loss of loved ones.

We pray for people in any kind of need...be close today to the lonely, despairing and the desperate. We name in our hearts those in special need who are in dark places today.....

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Lord, your love reaches beyond the grave. At the end of our days on earth be with us and with those we love.

May those who have gone before us rest in your eternal peace.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Lord, you are the Peace that the world cannot give.

Guide our leaders, NATO, the United Nations & the Security Council, and all world leaders that they will have the courage and wisdom to do what is right.

May they continue to seek for an end to the suffering caused by war, violence, injustice and inequality. May peace be the goal of their work, and peace the method of getting there.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer**

Loving Lord, open our eyes so we may see you: open our ears that we may hear you: and open our mouths that we might speak your praise.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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 today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**