Wednesday Worship

17th June 2020

Opening prayers

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus,
All **giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.**

Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:
All **let us sing to God with thankful hearts.**

Open our lips, Lord:
All **and we shall praise your name.**

Lord, speak to us
All **that we may hear your word.**
Move among us
All **that we may behold your glory.**
Receive our prayers
All **that we may learn to trust you.**
Amen.

Introduction

Today's parable from Matthew's Gospel is the story of the man who went away and entrusted his servants with talents to take care of in his absence. A talent was a large sum of money in those days, equivalent to 15 years' wages for an ordinary working person, so it's a story with high stakes. But there are also great rewards.

Hymn: God of grace and God of glory

Prayers with lighting of a candle

The Lord is with us, he is our stronghold;
God will help at the break of day.

God is our refuge and strength,
ready to help whenever we are in trouble:
All **God will help at the break of day.**

We will not fear, even if the earth shakes,
and the mountains topple into the sea:
All **God will help at the break of day.**

Come now and look at the works of the Lord,
the awesome things he has done on earth:
All **God will help at the break of day.**

Be still and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth:
All **God will help at the break of day.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.;

All **with humble hearts we worship God.**

All **The Lord is with us, he is our stronghold;**
God will help at the break of day.

1st Reading: Genesis 41.46-57

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, 'For', he said, 'God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.' The second he named Ephraim, 'For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.'

The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do.' And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

Prayer of response

Lord, we see in Joseph
someone who had both faith and foresight.
He trusted you to reveal the meaning of Pharaoh's dream,
he believed in the interpretation he was given,
and he acted wisely to help the people around him.
Give us such faith to listen to what you say to us,
and to believe and act on it, trusting you as Joseph did,
even in hard times.

All **Amen.**

Psalm 119.33-41, 49-50

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,
and I will observe it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.

Turn my heart to your decrees,
  and not to selfish gain.
Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;
  give me life in your ways.
Confirm to your servant your promise,
  which is for those who fear you.
Turn away the disgrace that I dread,
  for your ordinances are good.
See, I have longed for your precepts;
  in your righteousness give me life.

Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD,
  your salvation according to your promise.

Remember your word to your servant,
  in which you have made me hope.
This is my comfort in my distress,
  that your promise gives me life.

Prayer of response

Lord, we turn to you for comfort and help.
Keep us steadfast in your way,
reassure us of your unfailing promises to us,
and give us the joy of your salvation.

All **Amen.**

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 4.7-11

The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of response

Lord, fill our hearts with love for others,
and inspire to use our gifts for the good of all.
And when we feel that we have no useful gifts
open our eyes to see, build our confidence,
and strengthen us through your Spirit.

All **Amen.**

3rd Reading: Matthew 25.14-30

'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."

Prayer of response

Lord our God,
you have entrusted us with many things.
By your grace help us to be good and faithful servants,
that we may do all things to your glory.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: Take my life, and let it be

Reflection

Today's parable is not one of the most comfortable ones. Rather it's one in a group of parables warning us about being prepared for the coming of God's kingdom that bring up subjects we'd rather not think about, like judgement.

I wonder if you remember when AIDS first hit the headlines back in the 1980s and the campaign that was launched in the UK in 1986. I turned 11 in 1986 and didn't really understand what it all meant but I remember seeing a leaflet featuring an ominous gravestone with the words "AIDS: don't die of ignorance" etched onto it. Of course, I was

ignorant, and perhaps that made the impact even greater, but I was scared by the image then and even now it is clear in my mind.

Warnings about God's coming kingdom and judgement can seem as scary as the AIDS leaflet did to me back in the 1980s. But we're not to let such warnings scare us to the point where we give up doing anything at all. People sometimes talk about being petrified by fear; they're so terrified that the fear paralyses their bodies and they are momentarily 'turned to stone'. But that shouldn't be the aim of a warning. The AIDS campaign, shocking and hard-hitting as it was, wanted to achieve something positive: it wanted to tell people the truth so that they could protect themselves. Similarly, now we have warnings about social distancing, wearing face masks and not gathering in large groups so that we can protect ourselves and others from covid-19.

And the Bible's warnings aren't put there to make us give up hope or live in fear but to help us know what to do to be ready for God's kingdom. So how do we get ready to live in God's kingdom? In the parable of the talents 3 slaves are given different amounts of money to look after for their master while he's away, according to their abilities. The first slave has the equivalent of 75 years' worth of a labourer's wages. The second slave the equivalent of 30 years of wages. And the third slave was given 15 years' worth of wages. The first 2 slaves used what they'd been given and had something to show to the master when he came back but the third slave did nothing at all. There are 3 things I'd like to say about this.

The first thing is that what we do matters.
If we have a gift, talent or ability that can be used for good purposes then we're expected to use it, whether it's for baking, teaching, running a company, farming or any number of other things. We're not given these things just for our own benefit but also to build each other up and help grow God's kingdom by using them for the good of all.

The second thing is that faithful efforts are recognised and rewarded, rather than spectacular results.
Both of the first 2 slaves doubled what they had received and both were given the same words of praise, yet one gave his master 150 years' worth of wages and the other gave him 60 years' worth of wages. They were rewarded because they'd done the best they could with what they had and succeeded as far as their own limits would allow them. The second slave could have said to himself, "I'll never do as well as slave 1, so what's the use of trying". He could have become resentful or jealous that he wasn't given as much as the other slave. Or he could have started to feel superior to the third slave, who was doing much worse than him, after all. Instead though, he accepted what he was given, did the work he was able to do, and didn't waste time comparing himself to people in different circumstances. In contrast the 3rd slave was neither praised nor thanked - not because he didn't do well enough but because he did nothing. Here, there is definitely a warning about the dangers of hiding what we have to offer, whether it's because of false modesty, fear, selfishness or laziness. Even the smallest action would have been enough but the slave wouldn't take a risk on putting what he'd been given to work, and so he lost out on the good things he could have had.

The third thing is that what we do in this life seems in some way to prepare us for what we will do in the next.
The faithful slaves weren't thanked, given a retirement present and then told to go off and do nothing from now on. Instead, they were given new and greater responsibilities by their master and started a whole new phase of joyful working alongside him. So maybe, when God does appear and we're with him forever, we won't be floating about doing nothing but

singing, which could get a little boring after the first 1000 years. Instead, we will perhaps have new chances to grow, develop, learn and work in creative and fulfilling ways. So, in conclusion, this parable is not designed to scare us but to show us that now is the time to do something positive for God, the Church and world, all the while knowing that every effort will be valued and rewarded by our loving God.

Intercessions

We pray for God's faithfulness to be known in our world.
Faithful God
All **glorify your name.**

In a world of change and hope, of fear and adventure,
make us bearers of good news to the despairing,
beacons of hope in dark places,
and people of care and goodwill to all those in need,
Faithful God
All **glorify your name.**

In human rebellion and obedience,
in our seeking and our finding,
may we always be ready to confront injustice
and speak for those who are not heard.
May the leaders of the nations govern wisely and justly,
so that your ways are known upon earth.
Faithful God
All **glorify your name.**

In the common life of our society,
in prosperity and need,
may we always be ready to reach out to others,
to do what is best for all and not just ourselves,
and to work together in the face of the things that threaten us.
Faithful God
All **glorify your name.**

Among our friends and in our homes,
may we live lives of love and care.
Bring help to those whose homes are not happy,
and to those who are lonely;
make us ready to welcome others into our lives.
Faithful God
All **glorify your name.**

In our times of joy, in our days of sorrow,
be with us, O Lord.
Comfort those who are struggling with illness, grief
or economic difficulties.
Help us to remember that the pandemic is not yet over
and people are still in need of help.
Faithful God
All **glorify your name.**

In our strengths and triumphs,
in our weakness and at our death,
may we always be assured of your loving presence, O Lord,
and may all your people be gathered to you in your kingdom.
Faithful God

All **glorify your name.**

Merciful Father,

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

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,,
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us.

All **Our Father, which art in heaven…**

Hymn: Thy hand, O God, has guided

Closing prayers

Eternal God,
our beginning and our end,
accompany us in our journey through life.
Dawn on our darkness,
open our eyes to praise you for your creation
and to see the work you set before us today.
Take us and use us
to bring to others the new life you give
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

May God give us his comfort and his peace,
his light and his joy, in this world and the next;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all, ever more.
Amen.