

Zephaniah 1: 7, 12-18; 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11; Matthew 25: 14-30

## **A Parable of Trust and Response**

This is the time of the year when some of our best and brightest young people are overwhelmed by the pressure of an excess of talent. What are you going to do next year if you could do any one - or more - of a whole range of career possibilities, because you are good at so many different things? You are a "Five Talent Person". The current best answer is to take a gap year and hope it all shakes down.

Today's parable is often referred to as the Parable of the Talents. Of course the "talents" referred to a denomination of money, not skills and gifts. The key to understanding this parable comes - as with so many that Jesus told - in the first sentence: "The Kingdom of heaven is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them....." We too easily skip over these words then get stuck on amounts and differences and materialism, not noticing the powerful word "entrusted". My preferred title for this story is "A Parable of Trust and Response."

The three slaves were entrusted with varying amounts. The one who was judged most harshly was the one who buried his money in the ground. He said to the master when questioned, "I knew you to be a hard man..." - this to a master who had taken the huge risk of trusting the slaves, not his family or his friends, but his slaves with his property in his absence. This master did not play it safe, and nor should we. Jesus didn't come to make us safe, he came to make us brave.

There is a story about a father who wanted to take his children climbing in the mountains. They drove into the area. The snow covered slopes looked beautiful and inviting. However one of the children was uncertain. Before beginning their climb, they spent some time in the Visitors' Centre looking at displays. It was warm and pleasant and interesting. Most of the family were keen to get going, but one boy convinced his father to leave him there for the day in the care of the Centre staff, while the rest of the family took their lunch up the mountain track, climbing high out of sight. He was happy. Then as the day went on, the displays became boring, being inside got stuffy, and he felt lonely. It got worse and worse. Late afternoon the family returned, exhilarated, exhausted, starving, and unable to stop telling stories about their adventures. The boy realised something of what it was that he had missed out on.

Jesus came to lead us out of a safe place, out of looking at life through glass and photographs, into really living. When we cannot wait to do what God really wants, when we are desperate to do God's will, then our lives and our church will become effective because we will be doing what matters. We have been entrusted with the care of this whole world. The GEOH Connection reminds us of that, every first Sunday of the month when they welcome everyone to reflect on ways that we can better care for God's Earth. The Special General Meeting this week took seriously

our responsibility to care for what we own. We are certainly entrusted with property and possessions. However the Zephaniah reading reminded us that wealth means nothing. It is all about how we care for people, as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. They, and we, are urged to remain alert, relying on faith, love, and the hope of salvation as we support one another doing what really matters.

Bill Hybels from Willow Creek says, "The local church is the hope of the world." That's not because of what we own or even how we care for our possessions but how far we are willing, or wanting, to be Jesus in the world in our time. There is nothing as effective as the local church when the local church is working right. That effectiveness means asking the hard question "Are Jesus and you and I really interested in the same things?" Many churches put their energy into doing things that don't seem to matter to God. The best clue we have about what matters to God is what Jesus spent his life doing. If we are followers of Jesus, that's what we are called to do. So we can check on our use of time and money. How would we answer the Creator of it all, if we were asked, "What did you do with all that I trusted to you?" What would we say as a parish?

We are so rich. In money terms this parish is really struggling. Notice what happens when the collection plate comes round: some of us put in envelopes, some already give through the automatic payment scheme and either put in little brown papers to show that, or give nothing at all, or maybe a token amount because it's a symbol of giving everything. Others empty out their small change - or perhaps generously give large notes. We still have too many spiritually committed people who pretend by their giving to be uncommitted! All our regular worshippers could contribute hugely to good long-term planning in the parish by going on the regular giving scheme, of envelopes or APs. Then Vestry could think ahead about outreach budgeting.

God asks for nothing less than our total obedience and the lordship of all our money! That doesn't mean you should give to the church everything you earn - unless God tells you to - but that you acknowledge God is like the master in the story in the sense of entrusting us with all we have. How our money is spent is a decision to be made in consultation with God. We are rich as a parish because we have amongst us people who genuinely want to serve God with all their assets and energy. Where do you find adventure? Where is your passions? If you are willing to trust God for a life that is both refreshingly dangerous and hugely satisfying, you will find real adventure and passion, and contribute to changing the world.

God has a better future for you than you could ever possibly imagine for yourself. Unlike the father and son in the mountain story, our God can be close enough – if invited - to our deepest feelings to give us the courage and insight to do what alone could never be possible. I want to invite you this morning to connect your hearts completely to God's mission, as you come up to receive communion or a blessing. From that, I would love to hear about what happens for you, today and in the weeks ahead. "For to 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."

What's nothing subtracted from nothing? The Kingdom of Heaven is all about trust and response: "For to those who are trusted, more trust will be given, and they will have an abundance of trust, but from those who are trusted with nothing, nothing will be expected." While it's a great short-term idea for young people, life is not a gap year: Jesus didn't come to make us safe, Jesus came to make us brave.

#### Hymns

592 Stand Up, stand up for Jesus

691 Faith will not grow

After sermon instead of prayers 681 Lord Let Me See

658 I the Lord of Sea and Sky

679 God of Jeremiah