

## **A Reflection for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Advent – from Revd Ali Massey**

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In our Gospel reading, Jesus is once again using a Talent as an illustration to teach his followers something of the nature of the kingdom of God.

When we think of the word talent, our minds go towards natural skills or abilities. But the meaning of Talent in this context is much broader. In the parable it has both the literal meaning of a huge sum of money – six thousand times the day rate for a labourer. But it also is a metaphor for all that God has given us, a whole range of gifts, abilities, opportunities, resources and time.

Our reading takes place, towards the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry. He had been feted by the crowds and welcomed into Jerusalem with hosannas and palm leaves. He had been interrogated by the Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians and temple authorities and now he is trying to prepare his followers for what is to come.

Jesus knows his time on earth is short and the disciples need to know how to cope without him. How to carry on his ministry of love and reconciliation. So Jesus uses stories to prepare them for a future without his physical presence.

This passage comes straight after the parable that is sometimes known as the parable of the foolish virgins. Those girls who weren't ready for the arrival of their bridegrooms with full lamps of oil. A warning to be ready, because we don't know the time or date when Jesus will come again in glory. An encouragement to live lives in anticipation of that time when heaven and earth will be as one.

Then Jesus tells his followers the parable of the Talents. The first man was given 5 Talents because his master knew he could cope with the responsibility of those 5 Talents. He goes off and used the Talents well and made 5 more. His master was pleased and says 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

The same happened with the man who had 2 Talents, he made 2 more. Once again his master is pleased and responds 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

The master expected the man who had been given 1 Talent to do the same thing. But the man was afraid of his master. He was afraid that if he didn't perform well then he would be punished. His fear of doing something that would make his master angry means that he does nothing at all. He isn't prepared to take a risk, so he wasted the opportunity given to him. The master is angry with the man. But the master didn't get angry because the man had tried and failed. The master got angry because the man hadn't tried at all, he had been paralysed by fear.

So, what does any of this mean for us?

Well, as Christians we live in a time of the now and the not yet. The present and the time to come. We know the truth of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we long for the time when he will come again in glory.

Our lives, lived in faith, are shaped by the understanding of what we believe about the future. Jesus coming again to bring about a new heaven and a new earth. That understanding affects how we live today. The imperative is to do what we can to help bring about that day, when the kingdom of God is seen throughout the kingdom of the world.

So, I wonder, I wonder if this parable is about using our gifts while we wait for Jesus to return. A practical if rather blunt demonstration of how we should live our lives in anticipation of Jesus' coming

again in glory. How we should all do our bit to help bring about the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

Perhaps this story can show us something of God's way of doing things. God expects us to make use of all the gifts that we have been given. The gifts that are uniquely ours to make a difference, to make things better, to increase the goodness in the world. The huge sums of money involved in the parable tell us something about the abundance of God's grace in giving us all so many skills, abilities, opportunities and resources.

Sometimes it can be hard to see what our own gifts and those opportunities are. When we are weighed down with worry and stress. When the world gets in the way, we sometimes forget that each of us are special and beloved of God. In this country we aren't used to blowing our own trumpets, or singing our own praises. But if we believe that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God, then we can start to appreciate the myriad of gifts that God has given each of us.

But if we think that we don't have the time, skills, opportunities or ability, then the temptation is to do nothing. But we are called to do something. God has made us each just who we are supposed to be. God has given us a unique time and place in God's universe with a set of circumstances that are singly ours. What we do with them is up to us.

If we are unsure then we can ask God for guidance. We can ask someone we trust for their help in discerning how we can best use our gifts. It may well be that you are already using your gifts to help bring about the kingdom. But there may be more or something different that God has in mind for you. But whatever happens, we are all called to be faithful with the gifts that we have been given. We mustn't give into the fear of not doing 'it' right. Or of doing something that makes God angry with us. If we use our gifts prayerfully and in good faith then nothing will be wasted.

God wants us to use all that we have been given. Not to keep our gifts hidden away, safely in the back of a cupboard, but to take a risk. To risk sharing the Good News of God's Son Jesus Christ. To risk coming alongside those who society deems unacceptable. To feed the poor, visit the sick and set the prisoner free.

So, as we wait for the time when Jesus *will* return, we can all do our bit. We can all do something to help bring about the kingdom and when that day comes we will hear Jesus say 'well done, good and faithful servant'.

**Amen**