

Sunday 15th November 2020

Sermon on Matthew chapter 25, verses 14-30

During the current lockdown I have found something that I am able to do very well. I am a champion procrastinator. I never let doing something interfere with my ability to think about things deeply and then do absolutely nothing, at least until I am on the very verge of being too late. Procrastination is said to be the thief of time but if you have studied the subject, as I have, there is always that very slim opportunity to complete something at the last minute. That is the skill. It is just as well that I am retired.

The gospel reading today describes 3 servants who will be entrusted with significant sums of money. It was not unusual at all, for servants to have reached positions of great responsibility and trust with their masters. The account is perhaps strange to our ears but very familiar to Jesus' listeners at the time. It is less strange if you remove the word 'servant' and replace it with 'employee.'

Two of the servants work hard, as active stewards who take their responsibilities seriously and they increase the value of the money entrusted to them. The master goes away and upon his return, says to them, "Well done, good and trustworthy servants: you have shown yourselves to be trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." They had each received different amounts of money but, in each case, doubled their value.

It is the third servant, the one who received the least amount of money who did nothing. He hid his single talent in the ground. At least he was able to hand it back. The master was angry, took the single talent and gave it to the servant who started with 10 talents and who was now wealthy. The fate of the third servant was grim: thrown into darkness outside, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In other words, separated from the love of God.

It is very easy to get involved in the stories that Jesus tells in the parables. You can start feeling sorry for the servant who loses even the little that he had been given. But Jesus' purpose was to make people put themselves in place of the characters and to think for themselves. After all, each is a parable; a picture of a situation that did not exist but with which we can readily identify.

The word 'talent' is important; in Jesus' time a talent was a weight of silver, thought to have been worth roughly the sum earned in 20 years of employment for an average worker. Now, we use it these days to describe personal abilities. We describe people as having a talent in art, in sport, in writing, in gardening and in many other activities which all require dedication and effort if they are to be successful. Within our church we have many people who are developing and using their God-given talents in so many different ways. Every talent is a gift and, as such, able to be used in the service of God.

A talent in the story is a very large sum. The talents that we have all been given are as precious and it is important that, though they may appear to have been given to us for nothing, nevertheless they are to be valued and used because, like the talents in the parable, they must be used. Why? Quite simply because a Christian is a steward and our lives and all that we have been given is there to be used in service to God.

Amen