

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church - 15 November 2020

“Parable of the Talents”

The Lord is faithful in all His words,
and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds those who are failing
and raises up all who are bowed down.

**Hymn: StF 59 Lord the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness shining:**

<https://youtu.be/uaTwx0ehbvM>

Prayer of Praise

God of unimaginable love, we give you thanks and praise.
For the love that welcomes the unlovely,
for the love that pardons the unworthy,
for the love that knows no limit,
we give you thanks and praise.

In the love that inspires our worship,
in the love of which we would learn more,
in the love we share in our caring,
we give you thanks and praise.

As your love in us serves our neighbour,
as your love tells its story through us,
as your love calls us your people,
we give you thanks and praise.

Amen

Prayer of Confession

Most merciful God,
We confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed.
We have not wholeheartedly loved you;
we have not loved others as we have loved ourselves.

In your mercy, forgive our past sins,
amend what we are, and direct what we shall be.
So shall we delight in your will,
and go your way, with Jesus Christ our Lord
Silence

Hear God's word of grace and the assurance of pardon:
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

your sins are forgiven for His sake.

Amen

Let us join in the Lord's Prayer. Our Father

Matthew 25. 14-25

1 Thessalonians 1-11

Address

This parable is one of the last that Jesus told to his disciples. He told it as he and they were walking to Jerusalem for what proved to be the last week of Jesus' earthly life. Matthew tells us that at that time Jesus told his disciples three parables beginning with the words "the kingdom of heaven will be like...". The three parables are the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the parable of the sheep and the goats and this parable. Jesus seems to be giving his disciples, and through them, the early church, final instructions on what they should do after he had gone.

So what does he say? Jesus compares himself to a master who is going away for a while, and is telling his servants what he wants them to do in his absence. He gives them tasks "each according to his ability".

The first servant receives five talents. This was a substantial sum of money. I'm sure that you remember that the first servant does well with this fund. He "put his money to work" and gained five more talents.

The second servant also does well. He receives two talents. Again, we are told that he earns two more talents. So he receives a lesser sum but, like the first servant, he earns a 100% return on the money that is given to him.

We aren't told what the servants do to earn the money. The parable isn't a guide to how to invest, but about people's attitudes. However, it does seem that earning the extra money involves some sort of risk, so perhaps running a business is involved.

But the last servant is afraid. He is afraid to take risks. He simply goes and buries the one talent that he receives in the ground.

After a long time the master returns and settles accounts with his servants. The first and second servants are both commended. The master says to each of them "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!"

No distinction is made between the first and second servants. The master recognises that each of them has done their best to fulfill his instructions. They have both doubled the money given to them: it doesn't matter to the master that one has earned five talents and the other only two. It is their attitude that counts.

So this is an encouragement to us all. I read this parable as meaning that God wants us all to work for the coming of His kingdom. At the end of the day, He isn't going to look at how much we achieved but at how hard we tried. Sometimes in the church we toil away for years in some role, and no-one seems particularly impressed. No one is

dramatically converted. Few, if any, thank us for our work. Or it may be that the work that we are doing for God's kingdom is outside the church, caring for someone or working for some other good cause.

No-one else may know how much effort we have put into working for coming of God's kingdom on this earth – but God knows. In the parable He says to both of the servants

"Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness!"

But the last servant is treated very differently. He hasn't tried at all to fulfil the master's instructions. He hasn't thought about what his master wants: he has simply thought about himself.

"Master" he says when challenged "I knew that you were a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

So the last servant hasn't lost the master's money: he has kept it safe. He does hand it back untouched. But in the parable that isn't enough for the master. The master is angry and calls the last servant "wicked" and "lazy".

The master points out that the servant didn't have to take on the risk and worry of running a business. He could simply have put the money on deposit with the bankers so that it would have earned interest. The servant has done nothing at all to increase the money and that is why he is condemned.

So this parable is a challenge to us all. Are we working for the coming of God's kingdom on this earth? Or are we sitting back and acting as spectators – watching but not engaging in the work?

Each of us has to face this challenge. We need to search our conscience and to ask "What am I doing to bring about God's kingdom? Is there anything else that God is asking me to do?"

The parable of the talents shows that God doesn't ask us to do the impossible. In the parable the servants are given five talents, two talents or one talent, "each according to his ability". The last servant isn't condemned because he was only able to contribute in a very small way. He is condemned because he hasn't tried at all.

Christianity is a religion that is full of hope. In our story the man with the five talents does take a risk for God and earn five more. People improve: Zaccheus promises to compensate all those he has cheated when gathering their taxes. The Thessalonians are told to be self controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. They are to:

"encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

We each have a task to do in building up God's kingdom and we all look to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. We may be hindered by illness, by age or, at present, by covid restrictions, but we are to press on with the work of building God's kingdom so that we may live together with our Lord Jesus Christ when He returns.

John Wesley taught that all people can be saved, and can know that they are saved, and so be able to face the world with confidence. John Wesley also taught that all

people can be saved to the uttermost, meaning that we can with God's help become his more effective servants.

I'm going to draw this address to a close by mentioning three things that I find helpful. Perhaps one of them will help you.

1. To read the Bible to gain a better understanding of what God wants me to do with my life.
2. Sometimes I look back to people older than me whom I have known in the church. I remember their faith, their commitment to God and their unstinting service. Often that service was quietly given, but when I thought to look, I could see that it sprang from their deep love of God. Perhaps you have known someone like that? If so, take strength from their example.
3. This autumn the Methodist Church has produced a booklet called A Brief Guide to a Methodist Way of Life. It was sent out with last week's email. It has suggestions about how we may draw closer to God. I have used some of the prayers from it for this service.

May this week be a time when we discover more of God's love for each of us, and more of God's love for our world.

Prayer of Commitment

Heavenly One,
you are beyond all knowledge and yet known to us.
You are outside of our experience
and yet deep within us.
We commit ourselves anew to
follow your will and to work towards your purposes
that all the world might be transformed
for the benefit of all creation.
Fill us with hope, we pray,
in Jesus' name.

Amen.

**Hymn: StF 503 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down**

<https://youtu.be/JGGcqhKShQ8>

Prayer of intercession

There is a response to our prayer

To the sentence Lord as we travel the road

Please respond Be with us and show us the way

Dear Lord, we remember our world and the many disputes and wars that trouble it.
May we play our part in seeking justice, a good way of life and peace for all.

Lord as we travel the road

Be with us and show us the way

Next we pray for an ending of this epidemic.
We ask that you will guide the politicians and health leaders who have the responsibility of making decisions for us.
Give them common sense, wisdom and strength

**Lord as we travel the road
Be with us and show us the way**

We pray for your Church throughout the World.
We pray for this church and for the other churches in our village
that we may be constantly renewed by your Holy Spirit for mission and service.

**Lord as we travel the road
Be with us and show us the way**

We pray for our friends and neighbours.
We pray for all those who are dear to us.
In the silence, let us pray for those we know who are in distress of mind or body. Let them know that you are there and that you bring healing and strength.

Pause

**Lord as we travel the road
Be with us and show us the way**

We offer all these prayers in the mighty name of Our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen**

**Hymn: StF 563 O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end**

<https://youtu.be/trs17OEH7E>

THE GRACE

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and
the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen**