

Sermon 15 October 2020, second Sunday before Advent
Reverend Irene

Matthew 25 14-30

It is possible that the word “talent” came into the English language from this story told by Jesus. Like all Jesus’ parables, they take some thinking about as they don’t necessarily mean what you think them to mean on first reading. The one we heard this morning is a prime example. On the face of it, the story seems to say that the more anyone uses their talents, their natural God given gifts, the more pleasing they will be to God and the greater their reward will be in heaven, and those who do not use their talents will be cast into darkness. Is this the action of our loving God?

Let’s look at the parable again: A man going on a journey sends for his slaves and distributes some of his wealth between them for them to trade in his absence. To one slave he gives five talents, to another two talents and to the third he gives one talent, according to how well he thinks they will rise to the challenge. Now a talent was not simply a coin, it would have been a slab of gold or silver worth many thousands of pounds sterling, so the master entrusted his slaves with a huge amount of his wealth.

By the time the master gets back from his travels, he finds that the first slave has done very well by doubling the amount of talents he was given from five to ten, so the master promises to give him much more responsibility in the future. Similarly the slave with the two talents has doubled the amount, so he too is promised greater things within the household. But the third slave just returns the talent he was given, no more, no less. Not only that, he tells his master exactly what he thinks of him, that he is a hard man who treated others unfairly, he was so frightened of losing his masters wealth that he just buried it in the ground to keep it safe, then happily returned it to his master in full, nothing lost, nothing gained.

His master is furious and calls him lazy and wicked, he takes the talent and gives it to the slave who has already got ten talents, then he banishes the slave to outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Initially, this seems harsh, it’s not like the servant squandered the money away on wine, women and song. He didn’t buy himself a new house and fast car, or the latest iPhone, he just kept the status quo and stayed safe!

And that is exactly what is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching.

The point is not really about the distribution of the talents, it’s about living and doing something worthwhile. It’s about having courage within ourselves to take risks, to get involved in improving the lot of others, because the greatest risk of all is not to risk anything. To go through life not caring enough about anything for fear of getting involved, is not be an option. The greatest risk and the greatest sadness of life is to play safe, stay securely in your comfort zone and to live cautiously.

This parable is a third in a series of four in Matthew’s Gospel in which Jesus talk about *eschatology*, the end times, the kingdom of God and judgement. Jesus knows his time is near to enter Jerusalem and the events that will lead him to the cross. He knows these are the last days in which he can get his message across to the disciples of what he expects from them when he is no longer with them. This story is meant for us too, it is an encouragement to step up to the plate and live our Christian lives as fully as possible by not hiding away from the wrongs in the world, because the day will come when we will be judged on our words and our actions in our time on earth.

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

A quote from 1940's German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer comes to mind when he wrestled with his responsibility to speak out against Hitler amongst the inaction of others.

He wrote: "The sin of respectable people is running away from responsibility."

Running from responsibility seems very like digging holes to me!

Now we are not living in times like Dietrich Bonhoeffer thanks be to God, but we still live in a troubled world, and we all run from responsibility from time to time. We don't speak up for fear of making waves, or we don't want to make the effort or give ourselves work so, instead we dig holes around ourselves and hide ourselves (our talents) away.

So read this parable again, let it inspire you to stare your fears in the face and stand firm with Christ.

Be brave enough to take action or make a stand when you see injustice.

God would prefer us to trust in him and try, than do nothing at all;

our faith comes with a responsibility to take risks, not dig holes.

I'll end with the words by American poet Marianne Williamson:

"We were born to make manifest the Glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.

And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."