

Worship for 26 July 2020

Welcome: Welcome—to what? Is this Sunday glorious sunshine, gloom or storm? Are restrictions easing further or being tightened again 4 months after lockdown began? We don't know from one week to another, do we? Well— Welcome to worship. Welcome to prayer and a time of reflection. Not yet, alas, to a time of gathering together in body, but still a time of gathering in spirit. And welcome to God's call to the work of the Kingdom. One thing we do know is that the Kingdom is among us, whatever the situation. And one of the consolations of this discouraging time has been seeing how many people have responded generously to their neighbours' needs.

Hymn: Will you come and follow me?

Prayer: Lord, we haven't always done as well as we should have, not for you and not for our neighbours. We haven't loved enough, cared enough, or done enough, and too often we have forgotten to look beyond our immediate circle. We know it isn't always enough just to say sorry; help us to make amends for the many ways we have gone astray or fallen short.

Lord, you are the light we follow and the path beneath our feet. Lead us to better understanding, better love and better observance of your commandment to serve our neighbours. Amen

Someone has written a 'blessing for the mitzvah of putting on a mask': Blessed are you, eternal our God, Sovereign of the world, who has sanctified us with commandments and commanded us to protect life. Amen

Today's reflection is brought to us by Ian Carnell, a Lay Preacher from Solihull, who looks at the parable of the talents and what it means for us.

The parable of the Talents

Reading: Matthew 25: 14-30t

Reflection by *Ian Carnell, a Lay Preacher from Solihull*. Imagine, if you will, that you work for a company whose president found it necessary to travel out of the country and spend an extended period of time abroad. So, he says to you and the other trusted employees, "Look, I'm going to leave. And while I'm gone, I want you to pay close attention to the business. You manage things while I'm away. I will write to you regularly. When I do, I will instruct you in what you should do from now until I return from this trip." Everyone agrees.

He leaves and stays gone for a couple of years. During that time, he writes often, communicating his desires and concerns. Finally, he returns. He walks up to the front door of the company and immediately discovers everything is in a mess--weeds flourishing in the flower beds, windows broken across the front of the building, the girl at the front desk dozing, loud music roaring from several offices, two or three people engaged in horseplay in the back room. Instead of making a profit, the business has suffered a great loss. Without hesitation he calls everyone together and with a frown asks, "What happened? Didn't you get my letters?"

You say, "Oh, yeah, sure. We got all your letters. We've even bound them in a book. And some of us have memorized them. In fact, we have 'letter study' every Sunday. You know, those were really great letters." I think the president would then ask, "But what did you do about my instructions?" And, no doubt the employees would respond, "Do? Well, nothing. But we read every one!"

Is this a message to us all?

If I put on a football jersey, does it make me a soccer player? No.

If I hold a football, does it make me a soccer player? No.

What would make me a soccer player?

The answer is if I played the game.

So it is with Christianity. I am only a Christian when I commit to living my life as an active follower of Christ.

To take the football analogy a little further, sometimes we think that if we wear the gear, watch others play the game, celebrate the captain, go to the club, we're actually playing the game. Wrong.

We are only playing the game when we are on the field, in the position allocated to us and using the skills given to us.

Christianity is a way of being in a life of service.

Throughout the gospels we frequently see Jesus go off by himself to pray. He doesn't do so to escape what is going on around him, but rather to deepen his relationship with his Father and fortify himself for the work ahead. He withdraws to pray, then goes back to teach, preach, and heal people. Then he withdraws again for prayer, and the cycle repeats. Prayer leads to action, and action leads to prayer.

What is it that excites us; that causes our heart to pound; our blood to race; our spirit to soar?

Nothing will move us from potential to productive until we are moved from passive to passionate

If the Master was to return today and ask us to give an account of our life, would we be ready?

Many Christians are nice people, but make no real contribution to their world, their community, or their church. They just kind of blend into the landscape. The words of the master still ring true today. "To whom much is given much is required."

When God does an audit on our life — and it is coming — is it going to show a profit or a loss? A negative or positive? Is he going to say, "Well done!" or "Lazy servant!" What's it going to show?

I shudder to think some of the excuses I will have to give for times in my life when I did nothing! I was basically living for myself. To stand before a Saviour with pierced hands and have him say, "Why did you never even make an attempt to get involved in my mission? You were so busy doing your own thing!"

We have received this incredible gift from God, the treasure of life itself and gifts with which to live it, and in addition, we have been given the gift of Jesus Christ.

What will we do with this gift?

Will we bury our treasure or will we use it to spread the Gospel and the love of God?

The choice is ours...will we use it or lose it? Amen

Go into the world and stand with those who are tempted.

Go into the world and hold those who are falling.

Go into the world and love those who are breaking.

Go into the world in the power of the Spirit.

Go into the world in the name of Christ who defeated the tempter

Hymn: Brother, sister, let me serve you

Prayer: Lord, in this extraordinary time of pandemic and medicine, of hostility and love, of isolation and community, of desperate uncertainty and

faith, we come to you humbly, all too aware of our failings and frailty. We cannot see our way clearly through the darkness, so we pray to you, our Light. We do not have the strength and wisdom we need to live as we ought, so we pray to you, our strength and our wisdom. We do not always love as we ought, so we pray to you, God's Love who lived among us.

We pray for the world at large: for mercy and healing for the millions who are ill, especially people who cannot afford medical care. We thank you for the healers and for everyone looking after family members, neighbours or strangers in times of crisis. Move our hearts to go beyond prayers and good wishes to help bring medical care to the people who need it most. We pray for justice and peace for the millions who are oppressed or surrounded by violence, and give thanks for the people who strive to bring justice to everyone and for the peacemakers. Move our hearts to support them with acts, not just words.

We pray for the United Kingdom: for the many who are or have been ill; for young people facing an uncertain future; for businesses facing closure and people facing unemployment; for people in the performing arts; for people who desperately need tourism in their area but fear its impact; for families longing to be together again. We give thanks for everyone who is labouring to find a way through the crisis and for everyone who has shown practical care for others. Move our hearts to speak up and to act on behalf of others.

We pray for our pastorate and for our community, especially for the people who are ill, undergoing treatment, waiting for delayed treatment, and for people who are mourning a lost loved one and people who can only wait for the end. We lift their names to you in our hearts..... We pray for our young people, schooling and plans disrupted, often disoriented and feeling insecure. We lift their names to you in our hearts..... We thank you for everyone who has continued to bring worship to us, everyone who is assessing risk and preparing for the day when we can once again worship together in person. Move our hearts to courage and insight for the 'new normal' and guide us from the old, familiar ways of church to being the Church you ask us to be, using our talents to serve you through serving the people around us. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: I the Lord of sea and sky