

Julie's sermon – 15<sup>th</sup> November – Matthew 25: 14-30

This morning I want us to think about “Using what we have been given by God”. Because that is what the story from Matthews’s gospel tells us we should do. The story of the talents. A talent back then was a coin albeit a coin that most of the people would never own because it was worth about 15 years wages. So if we say an average wage today is £25,000 then one talent would be worth £600,000 today. Most of us would never own one of these coins either.

And whilst it may sound a bit unrealistic that the master would give the servants that amount of money remember that this is a parable and Jesus is trying to show us that what God gives us is far beyond what we could have on our own. But he does ask us to put it to work for him so that there is a good return on his investment.

Of course we could be talking quite simply about money here. If God gives us everything we have then we should be using it responsibly and not frivolously. This story highlights how important it is to put our money to good use because that is how we see the kingdom of God grow.

But this story is about more than just money. Today, thanks to the medieval church, the word talent is used to describe a God given ability and we all have them. Each one of us has different abilities and some have more than others but we all have gifts which we need to use. An unused talent is a waste.

I am sure we have all heard of Antonio Stradivari the violin maker – probably the greatest violin maker ever. In 1716 he constructed an instrument which became his favourite and he played it regularly and it never left his side. When he died in 1775 it was sold and was valued at about £100.

In 1827, Luigi Tarisio, the famous collector, purchased it. But then it was not seen for decades. It received the name the Messiah, because those hearing the raptures of Tarisio became sceptical of there being such an instrument and like the Messiah they all waited but never actually saw it. The day Tarisio was found dead there were 246 exquisite violins in his home. They were crammed into every space. The best one was found in the bottom drawer of a rickety old bureau.

When the greatest Stradivarius, the Messiah, was played it had been cruelly silent for 147 years. But the silence continues to this day because in 1931 the instrument was purchased by W E Hill and Sons for £2,000 and in 1938 it was presented to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford to be kept in perpetuity in a room specially prepared for it.

When Antonio Stradivari lovingly built that instrument he intended it to be used and for others to enjoy the sound it made. Those who have owned it since his death have robbed us all of that pleasure because they are afraid they might damage it. What a waste.

God has given us all talents and he wants us to use them and not waste them.

In the story from Matthew’s gospel this morning the master gives three servants talents to use each according to his ability. The first two servants were given 5 and 2 talents, and they each invested them well and doubled their master’s money.

The third servant was given just one talent because his ability to look after money was obviously less than either of the other two. Maybe the servant looked at what he and his friends had been given and thought how much more the others had compared to him. Even if he doubled what he had he would only have what the second servant started with and he would never have what the first servant had. Why should he bother? Maybe he felt that his master did not value him so why should he value himself.

And so he took his talent and buried it in the ground where no-one could see what he had. There was no risk, no worry about how the investment was going. He buried it and continued with his life just as before.

When the master returns he calls his servants in to assess what they have done with his money. You can just imagine the tension in the room. After all this man had a reputation for being harsh. The first servant who was obviously the favourite bounces forward full of himself and presents the ten talents to his master with pride and the master is very pleased and puts him in charge of many things. The second servant who started with less had done just as well and so he too came forward with confidence and presented the four talents to his master and again the reception was good and he too was put in charge of many things.

By now the third servant must have been a bit nervous, maybe trying to hide himself in the corner of the room or hiding in the shadows, hoping that he would be forgotten. But the master called him to come forward and the servant handed over the one coin, the same coin the master had given him before he went away.

Now those listening to Jesus tell this parable must have been thinking it will be okay because now we will get the part when the master forgives the foolish servant and gives him the same rights as the other two. That was the usual pattern of these kinds of stories but they were in for a shock. The master was furious. Even if the servant was afraid of losing the little he had he could have put it in the bank and simply earned interest on the one talent it would have been better than doing nothing. Angrily the master takes back his coin and has the servant thrown into the darkness.

That may seem a bit harsh and it is. God wants us to use what he has given us and not to hide it away where no-one can see it. For some there will be many talents as with the first servant; most of us will be like the second servant and have enough talent but there will be some who feel that like the third servant they have been given very little talent and that they are not as good as those around them. I have just got one thing to say to that rubbish.

We are all gifted but each of us is gifted in different ways, which is just how God planned it. It would be no good if we were all like Steven Hawking or Beethoven or Mother Theresa or even like the man who sweeps the streets. We are all different because that is how God made us. And just as he made us all to look different and to act differently then he has given us all different gifts.

And we have to use those gifts whatever they are to help to bring the kingdom of God to this world.

It may be that you are gifted with talking and listening to people then use that gift because there are always people who need to talk. What an opportunity to share your faith.

You may be gifted in sport then great use it to give others pleasure. Because when they see how much you enjoy doing it that will touch them.

You may be gifted with green fingers then what better way to give God glory than to help his garden grow.

Your gift may be that of administration and let's face it we all need to fill in forms for everything these days and if you are good at it then use that gift to help those who struggle with it.

You don't need to be a brain surgeon to be gifted we are all gifted and we all need to invest our gifts to get a good return.

And a good way to get that return is quite simple – don't keep it to yourself. Share it with others either by enabling them to use their gift if it compliments yours or by giving them the joy of seeing you use your gift. When we use our gifts and others enjoy what we have done then that in itself is a return on the investment. When we use our gifts and enable others to use theirs then that increases the return and when others come to know that they too have gifts that they can use and help others too then the investment is immeasurable and that is what God wants us to do.

But don't try to be like others around you. It may be that God has given them talents you don't have. But trust me he has given you talents that they don't have and all the talents that God gives us are valuable and necessary.

Use what you have, use what you know and start where you are able. But don't expect to stay there because once you start to invest your talent it will grow and you will find yourself able to do things you never imagined possible.

Be like the first two servants and invest your talent and reap the reward. Don't be afraid – Go for it.

Trust in God because he only gives us what we can use but we must be daring and use what he has given us because he will call us to account and when he does he will judge us.

Don't be like the third servant thrown out in the darkness.

Recognise it, accept it and use it.

Who you are is God's gift to you what you do with that is your gift to God.

AMEN