



COLLECT, READINGS & REFLECTION FOR SUNDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2020
2nd Sunday before Advent

Collect

Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son was revealed
to destroy the works of the devil
and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life:
grant that we, having this hope,
may purify ourselves even as he is pure;
that when he shall appear in power and great glory
we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;
where he is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Psalm 90.1-8

- 1 Lord, you have been our refuge ♦
from one generation to another.
- 2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
or the earth and the world were formed, ♦
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- 3 You turn us back to dust and say: ♦
'Turn back, O children of earth.'
- 4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday, ♦
which passes like a watch in the night.
- 5 You sweep them away like a dream; ♦
they fade away suddenly like the grass.
- 6 In the morning it is green and flourishes; ♦
in the evening it is dried up and withered.
- 7 For we consume away in your displeasure; ♦
we are afraid at your wrathful indignation.
- 8 You have set our misdeeds before you ♦
and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

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1 Thessalonians 5.1-11

1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! 4 But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; 5 for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; 7 for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Matthew 25.14-30

4 "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; 15 to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. 17 In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. 18 But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." 21 His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." 22 And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." 23 His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." 24 Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." 26 But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? 27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29 For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30 As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Reflection – this week from Hannah

C.S. Lewis once said ‘Nothing you have not given away will really be yours.’ Today’s parable is, at least in part, an illustration of that truth. The parable of the talents is probably a story you know well, and that first soaked into your bones in school assemblies, used to draw out that helpful academic point that we must use what we’re given, or it will be taken away.

It’s not a comfortable story. But perhaps there is merit today in exploring it not as a cautionary or threatening tale, but as having something of value to say about potential and our identity- in this time, as in any other. There is, in this old and well-worn narrative, something nourishing to learn about who we are- and in whose image we are made.

Jesus tells us that each of the three servants is gifted a treasure. Two of them immediately put it to use, and they then find themselves in receipt of more. The other one, anxious, worried, fearful, diminished by a sense of inevitable failure, buries his, so that at least he will not end with nothing.

Treasure. The stuff that we hold dear. In this Pandemic, there has been a profound change in our sense of the choices available to us- it may feel like treasure has been snatched away. It’s easy to focus on what we don’t have, and to cling hard to what we have got left, rather than live courageously with it. The world has been turned upside-down, and we have been asked to be passive, contained, isolated for the greater good, as well as our own. Last week was Remembrance Sunday, and though trench warfare is a horror that we have blessedly no experience of, there is perhaps this year a new resonance with that trauma many soldiers felt at just being asked to sit and wait- to forfeit action and the instinct to fight. Well, in these times the temptation is to bewail our lack of agency- something that feels profoundly unnatural, to mourn all that was and is not there now. We long for bustling streets, the touch of another, a day at the Welsh Coast, a hearty congregation singing their worship. Our enduring hope though resides not in focusing on loss, but in instead concentrating on what we can do- and to live in the fullness of whatever that may be. We can go for a walk, we can garden, we can join others on Zoom, we can pick up the phone, we can make a cake for someone and leave it on their doorstep, we can- and I’m so grateful that many of you have- we can contribute to online worship in many ways, and, above all, under all, we CAN pray.

In some ways, if we focus on what we can’t do, we’re like that worker who buried the money- our world shrinks, and we cling with such nervous tenacity onto the smallness of each day. In doing that, we tragically, deny something of our own personhood, and also of God. The creative flow in today’s story is that God gifts us in potential and then calls us to use it. Our creativity, our resourcefulness, our brave and sacrificial living is what brings hope, and what reflects the character of God.

We are creatures of infinite potential, whose life’s pilgrimage is to grow into the image of the God who is love. So be encouraged to use whatever you’ve been given- to live generously with what we do have- to embrace the vulnerability that comes with that. In doing so, we are learning something of who we are- we discover that in ourselves, in each other, but ultimately in that divine mystery of love that is all in all. God.

God speaks our humanity over us. For us, from our perspective, it is an unfolding story in which there is always something unknown. And it's a thing to take seriously- many have suggested that in the face of the challenges of today- climate change, equality, well-being... the big question for Christians together is that of personhood. Who are we? As the writer Kallistos Ware puts it, What does it mean to be a person-in-relation according to the image of God the Holy Trinity? Because if we are committed to carefully discerning an answer to that question, then our response to all else will flow from it.

It is in the body of Christ that we are most authentically ourselves, and through the words of Christ today, we are invited to notice what gift there is in our day-to-day lives-... and rather than bury that gift, to instead use it creatively to bless others- when we do that, we are living out the Eucharist- offering back all that we have in thanksgiving to God. And when we do that, those words of C.S. Lewis become real: 'Nothing you have not given away will really be yours.'

Or, put probably better, but a bit more brutally by Christ- whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.