

Barthol Chapel and Tarves Sunday 15 November 2020

Worship Materials



Praise CH4 180

Give thanks with a grateful heart
 Give thanks to the Holy One
 Give thanks because He's given Jesus
 Christ, His Son.
 Give thanks with a grateful heart
 Give thanks to the Holy One
 Give thanks because He's given Jesus
 Christ, His Son.

And now let the weak say, "I am strong"
 Let the poor say, "I am rich
 Because of what the Lord has done for
 us."
 And now let the weak say, "I am strong"
 Let the poor say, "I am rich
 Because of what the Lord has done for
 us."

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Give thanks

The Word of God: Matthew 25:14-30 The Parable of the Talents or the Coins

14 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents

went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then 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." ²¹His 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." ²²And 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." ²³His 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." ²⁴Then 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; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." ²⁶But 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? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For 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. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Reflection

There is a story about a group of new Church members who were preparing to make profession of faith. One man in the group heard the minister say, "Now God has given each of you a unique talent. When you join the church, you are expected to serve God with whatever abilities you have." Well, it just so happened that this particular man was a reformed criminal. After he was released from prison, he had renounced the life of crime and gone straight. Joining the church, making a commitment to follow Jesus, was the first step in that effort.

Serving God was a little out of his line, but he wanted to do what he could. So he went to the minister and said, "Minister, church work is something I'm not real familiar with, but I can fix the church's electricity meter so that every other day it will run backwards. That way you'll never receive another electricity bill! Perhaps some talents are just inappropriate for use in the service of God, no matter how sincerely they're offered!

Well far be it from me to discourage people from using their talents in the service of God's kingdom or indeed of the Church. And for centuries the Church has interpreted today's parable in just this way – equating the master with God who gives us talents and stressing the importance of using these talents in the service of the kingdom. Now it is true that God gives us different gifts and it is important to use them and not neglect them. But is that really what this particular parable is all about? If it is then what is it saying about the kind of God we worship? Is God really to be equated with an absentee landlord who is a harsh and demanding master? Does such an interpretation not lend support for systems or structures that are unfair or unjust? Surely this is not an ethic for God's kingdom? Let me remind you of the story again.

A wealthy man calls his servants together and he tells them that he will be out of the country for a long time. He entrusts his sizeable fortune to his three servants. He has learnt to appreciate their abilities and is confident that they can be trusted with his wealth. And so he gives one servant a total of 5 talents, a second one 2 talents and a third one 1 talent. In those days a talent represented a massive amount of money. A single talent would have been worth over half a million pounds in today's money.

The first servant puts the talents entrusted to him to work and after some time doubles his money. The second servant does the same with his 2 talents. But the third buries his talent in the ground. Eventually the master returns and he calls his servants together to settle accounts. The day of reckoning has come and each servant is asked to report on the performance of the money he was given.

The first servant brought the master not only the five talents that were given to him but also the five that he had gained. He handed his master a huge amount of money. The master is generous with his praise and his reward. "Well done", he says. And he calls the servant good and faithful. He puts him in charge of many things and invites him to sit at his table as an equal. Then the second servant brings in the two talents that were given to him with the profit he has made and the master rewards him as well.

Then it is the turn of the third servant and he gives a little speech. He boldly describes the master as a hard man, who harvests where he has not sown, and gathers where he has not scattered seed. Then he explains that he was so afraid, he dug a hole in the ground and buried the money. The master's response to this servant is the opposite of his response to the other two servants. No words of praise. Instead the master-servant relationship is terminated and the servant is cast into outer darkness.

The way the Church has traditionally interpreted this parable seems to contradict everything else we read in the Gospel about God, and about the kingdom. So what do we do with it? Might there be another interpretation? And the answer to that is yes. This parable is also referred to as the parable of the coins. And therefore we might take this story at face value – as a story challenging us about what we do with our money and our wealth. After all the story describes a situation with which Jesus original hearers would have been all too familiar. They had plenty of experience of the unfairness of the economic system of the day – the absentee landlord, wealth lying in the hands of a small group, a system that saw the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

By this interpretation, the master represents the powerful and wealthy elite of the day. The third servant is the one who, by burying the talent given to him, refuses to be part of an exploitative system. The servant knows the likely consequences of his actions – that his refusal to make his master even more money by investing in an unjust system, will incur the wrath of the one who holds the power. Yet still the servant refuses to use the money the master has given him to contribute even further to the gap between rich and poor. By adopting a path of non-violent resistance, the servant brings shame upon his master and he suffers the consequences – loss of work and home – as he is thrust out into the darkness.

But where then, you might ask, is Jesus in this parable? And surely the answer to that question is that Jesus is standing on the margins. He is standing with the servant who took the risk of resisting the system. Think about it! Jesus stood up to those who held religious,

political and economic power in his day. The result was the darkness of Calvary and the cross. And Jesus says to his disciples, "Follow me".

Understood in this way, today's parable takes on a whole new significance for us and how we live in today's world, a world where power and wealth still lie in the hands of a few, where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. Suddenly we realise that this parable is in perfect accordance with the rest of Jesus teachings about God's reign of love. But suddenly too it becomes much more challenging for us personally – what will we do with our money?

So let me finish by reminding you that God in Christ has already faced the challenges that living in this world presents. And he goes on before us into the darkness opening the way to a better world beyond. The question for us today is are we prepared to follow in Christ's footsteps and resist injustice? Will we stand up against unethical economic structures that keep millions in poverty and a few in great wealth? Will we invest our God-given gifts, including our money, in ways that build Christ's Kingdom of love here on earth?

Pointers for Prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- The NHS
- The governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and their advisers
- Businesses struggling and all who are facing redundancy and financial hardship
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the current restrictions
- The United States as they prepare for a new president

You might like to close your time of prayer with the Lord's prayer.

Praise CH4 509 Jesus calls us o'er the tumult

1 Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his voice is sounding,
saying "Christian, follow me."

2 As, of old, St Andrew heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.

3 Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,

from each idol that would keep us,
saying "Christian, love me more."

4 In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."

5 Jesus calls us; by thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.

Blessing

Notices

Next Sunday 22 November

Tarves Parish Church of Scotland. Registered Charity: SC 017161
CCLI: 2417487, 2417504, 241749
Barthol Chapel Parish Church of Scotland. Registered Charity: SC 010960

9.45am for 10.00am Joint Worship on Zoom (Service commences 10.00am) If you would like to be added to the e-mail list for the link to Sunday's live worship gathering on zoom or join in on your land-line please contact: Rob e-mail sessionclerk@bartholchapel.org or Susanna Tel 851345 or e-mail smbichard@aol.com. Worship next week will be led by Fiona Lister from Kemnay. Fiona is a student at Aberdeen university in training for ministry.

Advent Worship

During the four Sundays of Advent our worship will be linked to the traditional themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. Over the next week please think about these themes and e-mail Alison with suggestions of objects or images that symbolise for you one of these themes and I will include these in our worship. It would be good to have one from everyone who has been taking part in these Zoom services.

Also we are still looking for photos (preferably local) to include in prayer powerpoints.

Wednesday Worship Tarves Church 2.00pm a short act of worship in the Church. This week it will be led by Susanna.

Thursday 19 November Community Bible Experience 4.00pm when we will be discussing discoveries we make on reading Haggai, Zechariah, Joel and Malachi.

Care in the Community if you are aware of anyone in Tarves who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887. If you are aware of anyone in Barthol Chapel please contact James Hepburn 806611.

Pastoral Care Alison will be on holiday next week. Should you require the services of a minister urgently please contact Susanna Tel 851345