

Worship Sheet
Sunday 15th November 2020 at 10.30am

Welcome to this week's worship.

As we continue to live through this second lockdown and all the uncertainty that brings, we remember that God is with us constantly at the heart of our lives. We may not always recognise or be aware of God's presence but we are assured that He is there.

So, whether you are worshipping God by using this sheet or participating in the Christchurch Zoom service, think of each other joining in praise and prayer. Isolated, but not alone. May God bless you richly today and always.

Call to worship

Almighty God, King of all creation, Sovereign over all things, you hold the universe in the palm of your hand.

Enable us to keep our hearts fixed on you and our minds on your truth, for we desire to worship you as Lord of all.

Amen

Hymn – Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words

Great is thy faithfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKlqmdfHSk>

Psalm 139: 1-10, 23-24

¹ You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

⁵ You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Prayers of thanksgiving and confession

Use your own words to offer thanks to God and to lay before Him those things in your own life which fall short of His expectations.

We join in with the words of the prayer that Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours
now and forever.
Amen

Hymn – Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words

Wonderful Cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaO3XOI8P6w>

Prayers of Intercession

Lord Jesus we ask that you would, by your Holy Spirit, lead us to discover the good purposes which you have for our lives in your service.

Forgive us when we are self-centred, and unresponsive to your guidance. Sow the seed of your love in our hearts so that we might become urgent in the task of discipleship and aware of the needs of others. Let our minds be alive to you, that our thoughts would follow your holy will. May our mouths speak those truths which our world so desperately needs to hear. May our hearts be filled with courage so that we would go out fearlessly to minister in your name

wherever there is need. May our wills be conformed to your purpose so that in serving you we might find that peace which surpasses understanding.

We pray for our world in which there are so many damaged lives and fragmented families. Especially this week we pray for children, entrusted into the care of adults who betray their trust. In their vulnerability and innocence, guard your children and grant them your protection. We pray for professionals engaged in the work of caring for children, that they would always be diligent and careful. May they be wise in recognising signs of abuse and neglect. Give to organisations and charities involved in meeting the needs of children, a constant commitment to providing safety to all children.

At this time of great upheaval we pray for all of those who are worried about unemployment or their business failing. Lord God, you worked for six days before you rested. You enable us to enjoy a sense of purpose and personal value from the completion of work in our communities. As we see the numbers of unemployed and business failures rise reported in the news, forgive us Lord whenever we think of this problem in terms of just numbers. Remind us of the pain which is felt in human hearts when people lose their employment or their business. Give great wisdom to those entrusted with the ability to make decisions which affect our economies. Empower world leaders that nations may work together to find global solutions to the financial crisis which affects all countries.

We pray for the elderly. Heavenly father may we be ever mindful of those who have reached the autumn time of their lives. With so much experience, wisdom and knowledge, we pray that they would never disparage the contribution which they have made and continue to make to our families and communities. Old age so frequently means that we rely more upon others and there is a loss of independence and freedom. At this time may we ensure that our elderly are considered worthy of dignity and respect. So many people involved in caring for the elderly receive low wages and poor employment conditions. We pray that they would receive the recognition which they deserve and our gratitude for their commitment to others.

We pray for those who are sick at this time, whether from Coronavirus or some other cause, for those receiving medical care and those who are not able to access adequate facilities or the treatment that they need. Lord Jesus you possess a healing touch. Empower those who have the task of exercising care for the sick. Deliver our sick ones from the pain of illness and disease. In our brokenness may we discover your wholeness in body, mind and Spirit.

We remember all those who have died, who have triumphed over their disabilities, their pain and their discomfort and now have the glorious liberty of the children of God.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen

Matthew 25:14-30 from 'The Message'

"It's also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand pounds, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities. Then he left. Right off, the first servant went to work and doubled his master's investment. The second did the same. But the man with the single thousand dug a hole and carefully buried his master's money.

"After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand pounds showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The servant with the two thousand showed how he also had doubled his master's investment. His master commended him: 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner.'

"The servant given one thousand said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last penny.'

"The master was furious. 'That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.

"Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this "play-it-safe" who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.'

Reflection

A modern take on the familiar parable of the talents. A parable that Jesus used to teach his listeners about responsibility, honesty and judgement.

Matthew uses chapter 25 of his gospel to record three parables that Jesus told – probably towards the end of his ministry.

The first is the parable of the ten virgins - calling upon his listeners to keep watch and be ready. The third is a parable of judgement - where we as sheep or goats are required to give account before God of the way we have lived our lives. And the middle parable is this story about a man entrusting his assets to the care of his servants as he leaves on a long journey.

These three teaching stories sit comfortably together; be ready for action – take the right action – and be accountable for your actions.

This morning we'll spend a few minutes revisiting the parable of the talents. Luke also records this story - in chapter 19 of his gospel – so one might suppose that it stood out as being quite a memorable moment in Jesus teaching.

Jesus is nearing the climax of his Earthly ministry. Soon he will set his face to Jerusalem to confront the religious authorities and the occupying powers. He

knows that his time with his disciples is limited and his teaching turns towards preparing them for the times that are to come.

Times of challenge, hostility and danger; times when their own faith and commitment will be seriously called into question. Times when they will need to rely heavily upon their own skills and resources.

The world in which they were living was not safe and secure. It was constantly threatened by political tensions, warring nations, poverty, slavery and religious jealousies - sounds rather familiar doesn't it!

More than ever it was important that individuals questioned society's values and examined their own behaviour and goals in life.

So Jesus offers them this word picture about a master and his three servants. The Jews at that time would understand that the Master represented God and the three servants represented God's people, Israel.

The scene is set; the master steps back and leaves his servants in charge of a great deal of his wealth, and we watch how the servants respond to this great responsibility.

The first two servants, those with five and two talents get to work straight away using those talents to make more money. We are not told what they get up to, but the end result is that each of them doubles the original amount given to them – and, of course, each receives the grateful thanks and praise of the master.

The third servant has a different approach. He recognises the value of the talent and the duty he has to keep it safe until his master returns. So he digs a hole and carefully buries his master's money. He feels that the safest thing is to do nothing with the talent and return it intact and unused when the time came to meet his master.

The servants in this story were each given very large amounts of money. In the New International Version of our Bible Matthew uses the word 'talent' – whereas Luke speaks of each receiving amounts of 'minas'. The Good News version talks of 'bags of gold' and the modern translation from 'The Message' says:

'The man called his servants together and delegated responsibilities.

To one he gave five thousand pounds, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand.'

Originally a talent was a unit of weight – about 75 pounds. But then it went on to become a unit of coinage worth 60 minas which, the author Tom Wright suggests, would be worth roughly what a labourer could earn in 15 years! In other words – it was a great deal of money.

Jesus told parables to enable his listeners to take hold of a truth and understand its personal meaning for each of them. So as we engage with Jesus' story what does this beautifully crafted word picture say to us today?

Well clearly for us the master represents God and we take the parts of the servants. As the story opens the Master decides to delegate his responsibilities to his servants. Of course God can do all things and so doesn't need to delegate his responsibilities; but in this story he feels it is time to invite us to participate in his work.

So he equips each of us with skills according to our abilities. This phrase 'according to our abilities' is so important to note. It clearly states that God gives each of us the skills that we are capable of developing.

As we heard in the psalm at the start of our service God knows each of us so well that he can see our potential and understands exactly what we are capable of. It begins with this verse:

'You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.'

And when we are known by God there is nothing hidden. Our past is accepted, our present is his and our future is full of his potential.

So when Jesus says God gives each of us the skills that we are capable of developing we can be absolutely sure that we are in God's hand,s and part of his plan and purpose for this world.

So, the fact that one person might receive one talent whilst another might receive two or even five, is perfectly right and fair. And it's probably time we stopped being intimidated by everyone else's talents and set about nurturing and developing our own!

We are not told how the first two servants multiplied their talents. Maybe the exercise was easy and straightforward. Maybe it was difficult involving risk and danger. Maybe their task felt comfortable and natural to their inclinations, or maybe it was contrary to everything that they were used to doing. The fact remains that they used what they had been given and thus increased its worth. They served their master well.

Interestingly the third servant clearly knew and recognised exactly what he had been given – a talent fit for his use. But the truth was that this man had no belief in his own abilities. Others may have seen potential in him but he certainly did not. He considered himself quite unable to develop what he had been given by his master.

And so when his master returned and the day of reckoning arrived his pathetic excuses did not impress. The talent had not been developed and as a result the servant was punished.

Here's a modern 'word picture'

A class of children were learning about growth and life cycles. Their teacher had sent away for a butterfly chrysalis for the children to keep and observe. According to the advertising - a large and exotic butterfly would be the end result. According to the lesson plans - the end result would be that the children would understand more about the life cycle of a butterfly.

The chrysalis was put into a large jam jar and the class waited with eager anticipation. Excitement mounted, but very little happened. Then, at the weekend, when the school was empty the miracle began. Slowly and carefully the butterfly emerged. The delicate insect clung to its empty chrysalis and waited whilst its wings gently unfolded. A coating of something like varnish gradually

hardened over the surface of the wings to provide the strength needed to beat against the air in flight.

There was great excitement on the Monday morning as the beautiful butterfly was carefully released from its jar. But sadly the butterfly was quite unable to fly as its unfolding wings had been constricted by the jam jar. The change from caterpillar to butterfly had been partial and ineffective because the creature had not been allowed the necessary freedom and space to fully develop.

So here's our challenge - as relevant as ever it was over two thousand years ago - what do we do with our talents?

We have a Christian duty to identify our own talents and find effective ways of using them and increasing their value. But we also have a duty to support others as they explore their talents – offering encouragement and discernment – ensuring that they are not trapped and disabled like the butterfly.

Though God wants to challenge us to develop our potential he will never stretch us beyond our capabilities. He will raise up people to come alongside us and help us work out our calling and responsibilities. In such a way God's kingdom will be truly built here in Marlborough and the surrounding area.

Of course - after all this - we could simply sit quietly in our own little corner and do nothing. The choice is ours of course. But think how exciting life could be if we are prepared to take the risk.

Hymn - Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words

Take my life and let it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sss-g50Dw1Q>

A prayer of blessing

Go into the world as God's servants; live for him knowing him as your Saviour and trust him in the assurance that he is the Lord.

Amen

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore.

Amen