

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 15/11/20

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Opening affirmation from Psalm 33: 1-9 ¹

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; **it is fitting for the upright to praise him.**

Praise the Lord with the harp; **make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.**

Sing to him a new song; **play skilfully, and shout for joy.**

For the word of the Lord is right and true; **he is faithful in all he does.**

The Lord loves righteousness and justice; **the earth is full of his unfailing love.**

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, **their starry host by the breath of his mouth.**

He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; **he puts the deep into storehouses.**

Let all the earth fear the Lord; **let all the people of the world revere him.**

For he spoke, and it came to be; **he commanded, and it stood firm.**

HYMN – SF 2231 ²

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul

Worship His holy name,

Sing like never before, O my soul

I'll worship Your holy name.

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning

It's time to sing Your song again,

Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me -

Let me be singing when the evening comes.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul

You're rich in love and You're slow to anger,

Your name is great and Your heart is kind,

For all Your goodness, I will keep on singing -

Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul

And on that day when my strength is failing

The end draws near and my time has come

Still, my soul will sing Your praise unending -

Ten thousand years and then forevermore.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul

Prayer of praise

Lord God, holy and mighty One, we worship and praise You for You are rich and generous in love, abounding and overflowing with grace. You are merciful, forgiving and compassionate not treating us as we deserve always seeing the best, ever hopeful and trusting. Your heart is kind towards us and You are absolutely and consistently good. You are faithful across the ages and throughout time. You are present and steadfast through all the varied circumstances of our lives and across the full extent of our lives. It is our joy and our delight to give You endless praise in time and beyond time, in joy and sorrow, in good times and bad. We give thanks for who You are and all You do in creating, saving and guiding. We offer You our prayers in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Reading – Matthew 25: 14-30 ¹

¹⁴ 'Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ 'After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

²¹ 'His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

²² 'The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold: see, I have gained two more."

²³ 'His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

²⁴ 'Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

²⁶ 'His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Talk Part 1

I was sitting cross legged on a hard parquet floor on a Sunday afternoon when I first heard this story. I had little understanding of money, none of economics, banking or investment but what I did understand was that I should work hard at school struggling with spelling and sums. This story confirmed that, or so I was told. I had been given talents to be used to be improved by hard work and practice. The moral was don't waste your talent whether it is for music, for art or maths. Well, that is a great lesson to teach but that is not what Jesus meant or what people understood when he told his story with a meaning. Here then there is another 'blessed are the cheesemakers moment' where we mis-hear and misunderstand! The misunderstanding begins with the word talent and goes on from there. My Bible has included a heading for the story, the parable of the bags of gold, and that helps. A talent was a weight, like an ounce or a kilogram and when it was used to weigh precious metals like gold it had a value. In this case it has been calculated that a talent's weight of gold was the equivalent of 15 years wages for a labourer. So all three servants or slaves had a big responsibility and a great opportunity in what they were given no matter how many bags they were given. So this is a story about being entrusted with something precious but what and why?

It is about a master who has gone away entrusting his kingdom and his possessions to those who serve him in the expectation his commands will be followed, his kingdom will prosper and his assets will grow in value. As so often the story works in the moment it was told but also for us now and for a time in the future too. At the time of telling there was a real feeling of the absence of God as though he was like a wealthy landowner who had gone away, who knows where and who knows when he would return. The longing for God's return, for the Messiah to come and to rescue his people from Roman occupation and oppression was a regular topic of discussion in the synagogue, at the well and in the public square in Jesus' day. So this is a parable of challenge to the leaders and people entrusted with God's message, entrusted with the covenant promises, the commandments, the law and the temple. All of which were given to be shared and to bless others, especially those outside of the community. The question posed by the story is, had they held that trust close, treated it as if it were their own, failed to see its value and treated it like a worthless dead thing and so buried it in the ground? Or had they lived out their individual and national calling to receive God's blessing in order to bless all the nations on the earth as God had said to their founding father Abraham? In terms of the story had they acted like the first two slaves or the third one? Well, I will leave you to wonder about that for a moment during our next song.

Hymn – SF 2756 ³

Come set Your rule and reign in our hearts again;
Increase in us we pray, unveil why we're made;
Come set our hearts ablaze with hope,
Like wildfire in our very souls,
Holy Spirit, come invade us now.
We are Your Church, we need Your power in us.

We seek Your Kingdom first, we hunger and we thirst;
Refuse to waste our lives, for You're our joy and prize;
To see the captive hearts released,
The hurt, the sick, the poor at peace,
We lay down our lives for Heaven's cause.
*We are Your Church, we pray revive this earth.
Build Your Kingdom here, let the darkness fear;
Show Your mighty hand, heal our streets and land;
Set Your church on fire, win this nation back;
Change the atmosphere, build Your Kingdom here, we pray.*

Unleash Your Kingdom's power, reaching the near and far;
No force of hell can stop Your beauty changing hearts;
You made us for much more than this, awake the Kingdom seed in us;
Fill us with the strength and love of Christ.
*We are Your Church, we are the hope on earth.
Build Your Kingdom here, let the darkness fear;*

Talk - Part 2

What do you say? Jesus leaves people to decide for themselves where they are in the story but clearly he made himself unpopular by these probing questions which must have hit home. If people act like the third slave why do they do that? Well the words of the third slave give us a clue, don't they! How did he describe his master?

'Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground.' (Verses 24 and 25a) He despised the trust he had been given because he despised the giver of the trust. It was not that he did not appreciate the gift, the bag of gold, the talent weight of value but that he did not appreciate the giver. He had a false view of his character and motives. How he saw his master determined his response to the task he had been given. How do you see God? Is He absent, like the master in the story? Is He making hard demands on us? Is He untrustworthy or someone to be frightened of? That is how the third servant saw his master. Now is a moment to look again, to look at Jesus, God with us and ask Him to show you the true heart of God, to show God's true nature and motives. Then you can receive His precious gifts of life and hope. Then you too can look forward to hearing Him say to you 'come and share your master's happiness'. Then you will want to share those gifts and see them multiply.

We all need to hear the challenge of this parable for we can all find our understanding of God becomes distorted by the warring pressures of life, by familiarity or neglect. We have the gospel, the word of God, the revelation of the life of Jesus, his teaching, his death and resurrection. All our hope in Him is found. It has been entrusted to us. The question is what are we doing with it? Are we taking it out into the world on behalf of our master, sharing it, putting it to work and seeing it multiplying? Or are we holding on to it, burying it away inside our hearts or inside our church? If we truly knew the value of the treasure we have been given and if we truly understood we serve the all-powerful, Almighty God of all the universe who gave his life for love of every woman, man and child that has ever lived and who does not want any to perish, wouldn't we be more committed to sharing this hope, this life, this precious gift? These are the God-given bags of precious gold we have been given and which we must use or lose. O God give us a fresh understanding of your love, your grace, the salvation and hope we have received and may we never take it for granted or cease to share it. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Lord, You have entrusted so much to us: people to love and care for; abilities and skills of body and intellect; wealth earned or inherited; and the good news of Jesus, Your Son.

We confess we have sometimes betrayed that trust:

we have hurt and neglected those who needed us;
we have wasted and misused the gifts we have been given,
burying our faith instead of allowing it to grow.

Forgive us, and renew in us a sense of joyful adventure as You call us to share Your work. Through Your cleansing and restoration may we take delight in all You have given, and share it with sensitivity and generosity. Amen.

Suggestions for your own prayers

Pray for

- Leaders of governments around the world especially in those countries where Covid-19 cases are high and rising.
- President elect Joe Biden and his team of advisors planning and preparing for the start of a new administration.
- The International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church today.
- Those facing abuse and violence from those they live with and those who have to leave home to find refuge and safety.

- Those struggling with mental ill health made worse by renewed restrictions.
- Those we know in need family, friends, neighbours, members of the church to which you belong. Name them before God now.
- Ourselves - ask God for what you need today.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN SF 829

I stand amazed in the presence
 Of Jesus the Nazarene,
 And wonder how He could love me,
 A sinner, condemned, unclean.
How marvellous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvellous! How wonderful!
Is my Saviour's love for me!

For me it was in the garden
 He prayed, 'Not My will, but Thine':
 He had no tears for His own griefs,
 But sweat drops of blood for mine.
How marvellous! How wonderful

He took my sins and my sorrows,
 He made them His very own;
 He bore the burden to Calvary,
 And suffered and died alone.
How marvellous! How wonderful

When with the ransomed in glory
 His face I at last shall see,
 'Twill be my joy through the ages
 To sing of His love for me.
How marvellous! How wonderful

Charles Gabriel (1856-1932)

Final Blessing

So may we go forth and tell, go forth and share and go forth and live to God's praise and glory and may the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be with us now and always. Amen.

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