

15 Nov 2020: Zephaniah 1.7,12-18; Psalm 90.1-8,(9-11),12; 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11; Matthew 25.14-30

Today's readings invite us to think about time;

*'Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.'*

and action;

*'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'*

And to remember that the timing is God's timing, and the action we are called to take is in the name of that same God who is urging us, in the name of Jesus, to be bold, step out, take courage and lift our heads and hearts to the light and to trust – to not be fooled by the darkness – or the insecurities of humanity that the world is presenting.

We are called to take opportunities as they come and to respond to where God is trying to move us on a path that is leading into the light – for us and for others, and that if we step out in courage we will be given what we need – and who we need - to make things happen and to share the good news of his love in thought, word and deed – along the way.

As +Andrew said in his sermon this week, the talents we are thinking about here aren't the ones on Britain's Got Talent or the St Peter's Got Talent that WILL happen some-day – but about the talent Jesus understood. A talent back then was literally weight – around 60-90 lbs – which amounted to a lot of money – equivalent to about 6,000 denarii which was 6,000 days labour or 15-20 years – so a lot of money.

And on return, the master begins to weigh up – judge- the way the slaves had used the talents and judged that the two who had taken risks and invested had done better than the slave who had been blocked by fear of failure or getting it wrong or losing it, that this slave had, indeed, failed in the eyes of the master. It seems here as if we are being told that actually, the trying is the achievement..

I wonder what would have happened if the slave had tried – and messed up? What would the master have said then? And that comes down to trust, doesn't it? Trust in a fair and compassionate master who would be there to console and understand and to commend the trying.

Is that the master – the God that you have in your life and understand through Jesus' illustration? Or do you visualise God's presence in your life as one of a judging nature, ready to condemn you if things that you try don't go to plan ...

So this slave who buried his talent – a common way of hiding your possessions in those days – was doing just that – hiding it and keeping it to himself..

And that's the point Jesus is making. Keeping things to ourselves through fear or not wanting to share – possessions or indeed our faith – is not what he wants to encourage us to do as his followers. Jesus is wanting us to help build up God's kingdom of justice and mercy and love – by leading by example of an open and inclusive and generous-spirited life, because by living intentionally in faith is the kind of living that will have the power to make a difference in the world on the ground.

And by being together – a child of God becomes children of God – a church family can encourage and comfort and strengthen one another – and can make the load lighter as we walk our individual journeys of faith in a communal way.

Jesus is making a strong point – the 'gnashing of teeth' is bound up in the Jewish people's understanding of that kind of language used to describe a matter of judgement and punishment – salvation – being saved from not being able to live in the dark without the light of God's love guiding the way – was longed for throughout the story of God's people and Jesus is here and now bringing that language to bear and explaining how it plays out in the context of a grace-filled life and grace-filled laws – and likely making sure that people took his message seriously...

So, for us today and in the coming days, we can give thanks that we can actually hear the message of the kingdom of peace and hope no matter what – no matter how shaky – and that we can live it out in our lives in a measure, with our friends of faith to help and encourage us – and we them – along the way. And we can also respond to the call of Jesus to commit to that faith and trust and to use the gifts we have to God's glory, in the name of Jesus, with the Holy Spirit's empowering us to do so. Our wealth, our voices, our creativity and our deeds all carry a blessing of grace through our faith – they are bestowed upon us to be shared and bestowed on others and therefore returned back to God himself who graced our lives first.

From keeping the church fabric on a firm financial and structural footing – to supplying food for the foodbank – coats for the cold – shelter for the homeless – pastoral care for those who need comfort and encouragement – friendship to the stranger – social fun and engagement to prevent isolation - we are being called to work for the Lord and we have been given the resources to do that. We don't need to bury our gifts – God is working with us and for us and through us – we really don't have to be afraid to step out in faith – and if we are, we can pray for courage and conviction to rest in our faith in trust.

We are entrusted with God's riches and just because it seems he is far off sometimes and won't be back for a while, we need to remember that he is with us – and we are not running the show – and what we have belongs to him in the first place and all that we do is for his glory – which – at the end of the day - is love ....

*'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. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.'*