

**15/11/20: 33 Ordinary Time: 2 Before Advent: Circuit  
Podcast: Matthew 25 v14-30**

Hello

We've been working our way through Matthew's Gospel for most of this year, and we're coming towards the end, as we draw towards Advent and a new cycle of readings.

One of the patterns we can see in Jesus' ministry in Matthew is in His teaching. At the Sermon on the Mount and in the early part, Jesus teaches His followers about how to live well, how to follow His way, and how to put the Kingdom of God first. As things go on, Jesus finds Himself more and more at odds with the religious authorities, the Scribes and the Pharisees. This all comes to a head in a long series of difficult questions they challenge Him with, and in His answers Jesus makes it clear that they have lost their spiritual authority, and that Jesus Himself is The Authority. In His later teaching Jesus speaks about the future, about the hope of the Kingdom of Heaven, about life lived well now and with God's eternity in mind.

This is where we have come to now, with the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids first, and now the Parable of the Talents. These are not talents as in "Britain's Got Talent", it's not about which of the characters was the most able, with a lovely singing voice or clever magic tricks. This isn't really a story about making money either, although I have heard of it being used as an inspiration for church fundraising activities.

A talent in the Bible is a measure, of volume or weight. When we come across it we could think of "buckets-full", so in the parable, from the owner's property, one person is given five buckets-full, another is given two buckets-full, and the third is given one bucket-full. For each person, the amount they're given matches how capable they are, and I think this is where we begin to see what Jesus is getting at in the parable: the buckets-full that people are given stand for the opportunities and resources they have in life. Some of us are born with everything going for us, and some of us are born with everything against us, and probably most of us are somewhere in between, and the changes and chances of life sometimes go well for us and sometimes challenge us severely. We're especially faced with these issues just now, when the trials the virus is bringing are falling hardest on people who are already up against it, and the effects of catching it can be quite random from one

person to another. What this parable shows, is that from God's point of view, it's what we do with what we have that makes a difference. What Jesus always calls us to is to love with all we've got, to help each other through trouble, to love each other as God loves us.

Two of the people go and trade with the owner's money, and through their hard work, they come back with double what they started with, and the owner is pleased with them. They have been trustworthy with a few things, meaning that they have lived their life well, so they will be in charge of many things, meaning they will have eternal life, and they will enter into the joy of their master, they will enjoy the fullness of God's presence

The third person hides the money in a hole in the ground, and we find out later that it's because he is afraid of his owner. Sadly, this person has wasted the opportunity of life that God gave.

Being a parable, the important person, the owner, stands for God, and the people, the slaves, stand for us, God's people. It's sad but true, that many people have the idea that God is mean and harsh, and that we should be afraid of God, and religious people have promoted that idea of God, but Jesus said so often "do not be afraid" There's a much stronger thread, through the whole Bible, of confidence in God's love, of thankfulness for God's goodness. Jesus calls us to follow Him, to travel with Him out and about among other people, to love one another as He loved us, not to hide our life away, like treasure buried in the ground. Life is a precious thing, and so many people will say, that even in the face of great difficulties, life is for living.

To go back to the other two people, the ones who doubled their owner's money, there was no competition between them, they each had a different measure to begin with, and the owner was happy with each of them because they returned from their work with the same again, each doubled what they had been given. It's perhaps a relief to realise that God doesn't expect more of us than we are able, and we certainly shouldn't measure our life of faith in comparison with someone else, either so that we feel like a failure, or so that we feel a bit self-satisfied. God calls us to love with all we have, with all that we are, and with all that we do, and our best is always good enough, now, and forever.