



To Invest or to Dig?

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **green** cloth or scarf because we are now in "ordinary" time or a time of "growing together". Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*

Light Candle

We light this candle...

Light the candle

And we breathe...

and we turn towards the one who is the Light of the World:

Jesus the Christ.

We seek the light.

We celebrate the light.

We allow ourselves to be drawn to the light.



Video - When We Breathe: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuHYORwtfwc>

I invite you to breathe as we watch and listen...

Acknowledgement of Country

In this place,

where the land meets the sea,

where the sea makes a noise,

since time beyond our imagination,

the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have cared for the land and the sea and its creatures great and small.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders:

those who have carried the sacred stories from generation to generation

those who carry the sacred stories today

and those who are learning and growing so that the sacred stories may be carried into the future.

And we pray for our future together - there is work to be done -

to build relationships that honour and respect those for whom this land is embedded in their being.

We commit ourselves to the way of love.

Introduction

Today we come to the penultimate week in the Church's calendar.

Next Sunday, at Jamberoo, we will celebrate the end of the Church year as we begin to turn our attention towards preparing for Christmas.

So in our worship today, we will try to draw together some of the strands we have been thinking about, particularly through these last few months.
Strands of traveling with Moses and the people of Israel through the wilderness;
of the life and teaching of Jesus through the eyes of the gospel writer of Matthew.
remembering and worshiping the One who draws us together and sends us into the world to be agents of God's realm in our homes, in our streets, in our workplaces, in our places of rest and leisure.

Call to Worship -

Full of energy.
Ready for anything.
Eager to encounter your disrupting Spirit.
We come to worship you, O God.

Running on empty. Drained.
Over-scheduled and over-worked.
Listless. Hopeless. Just plain tired.
When we can't see another way,
We come to worship you, O God.

We come to be renewed and restored,
to feel our attitude shift.
Together, we will find our way into joy.
We will be filled with God's love and grace.

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 19 November 2023, p.158, adapted

Opening prayer

We joyfully receive your abundant gifts, God.
We pause to feel the power of life within us,
the potential for compassion around us,
and your steady ground of hope beneath us.
As we worship you together today,
breathe life and hope and love amongst us, we pray,
that we may be renewed for the life you call us to. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 19 November 2023, p.158, adapted

Sing - Praise With Joy The World's Creator (TIS 179)

Let's stand as you are able to offer our praise to the World's Creator.

Praise with joy the world's Creator,
God of justice, love and peace,
source and end of human knowledge,
force of greatness without cease.
Celebrate the Maker's glory,
power to rescue and release.

Praise the Spirit sent among us,
liberating truth from pride,
forging bonds where race or gender,
age or nation dare divide.
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure –
Foolishness none dare deride.

Praise the Son who feeds the hungry,
frees the captive, finds the lost,
heals the sick, upsets religion,
fearless both of fate and cost.
Celebrate Christ's constant presence –
Friend and Stranger, Guest and Host.

Praise the Maker, Son and Spirit,
one God in community,
calling Christians to embody
oneness and diversity.
Thus the world shall yet believe when
shown Christ's vibrant unity.

Words: John Bell and Graham Maule

Prayer

Lord God,

giver of all good things, giver of life itself,
we worship and adore you.

We praise you for this community of faith in which we have found home.

We praise you that you entrust us with responsibility for our own lives and the care of the people around us.

We praise you that you created the earth
and asked us to care for it.

But we recognise that we took control and have exploited the resources you gave us.

You gave us enough and more to share.

We hoarded as though things were scarce and let others go hungry and voiceless.

God, if we have learned nothing else in this season,

may we never forget how connected we all are
across the world.

When one part of the body hurts,
all suffer.

So, God,

before we lose sight of all that you've taught us,
unclench our hands

and release in us your generosity.

Convict us once more of your call to us

to clothe the naked,

to feed the hungry,

to house the homeless,

to give sight to the blind and healing to the lame

- such is your power and your faith in us.

May our worship then renew and equip us

to serve you by serving the world.

Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 36 , Resources for Pentecost 24, 15 November 2020, p.113

Sing - Take This Moment (ATOK 414)

This song continues our prayer, offering ourselves to God in this time and moment, whether we have got it all together or are just hanging by a thread...

This might be unfamiliar to you, so feel free to stay seated and listen if you prefer.

Take this moment, sign and space,
take my friends around.

letting your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget.

Here among us make the place
where your love is found.

Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old.

Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.

Help her/him here to find her/his worth,
made in Christ's own mould.

Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,

Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be.

Let my life be yours, and yet,
let it still be me.

Words and Music: The Iona Community

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

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."

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Let us pray,

Christ Jesus, you taught your disciples in parables - using story and metaphor and allegory to invite us to ponder and dream with you about what God's realm is about.

Sometimes, like today, understanding does not come so easily.

So help us, Spirit of Christ, blow through us with wisdom and courage.

Deepen our understanding and help us to shape our lives in ways that reflect your realm amongst us. Amen.

Today we encounter another difficult parable - again appearing in this collection of Jesus teaching about God's kingdom. And this time there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (25:30) - such an evocative image courtesy of the writer of Matthew's gospel!

But before we dive into the parable, we need to remember that it is just that - a parable - a story told to invite us to compare - but in this case, compare what with what? Jesus, in this case, doesn't exactly say what this is about - perhaps, as it follows on from the story we

explored last week about the young women waiting for the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13), we can suggest that this story also is about what God's realm is like.

But there are a number of ways we can interpret this parable - and as I thought about this, I was reminded of a lecturer in theology, now Professor, Ben Myers, who gave a sermon at the United Theological College in 2014 about "10 rules for preaching the parables" which he then published on his blog, *Faith and Theology*. If you are interested, I have reproduced the 10 rules and put a link to the blog in the online materials.

The first two rules, Ben suggests are:

Rule #1: Don't assume that God is necessarily one of the characters in the parable.

Rule #2: Don't assume that the parable is trying to tell you how to improve your life.

Those two are challenging enough, right? But then, this one stood out for me this time:

Rule #7: If you feel perfectly confident and untroubled while expounding the parable, you're probably doing it wrong.

And the last one...

Rule #10: Finally, if you've preached a lousy sermon, just remember: as long as the parable was read aloud before you started, it won't be a total loss.

So, this parable with its master leaving the servants with a bag full of talents - what might it mean?

Let's start with, what is likely the most familiar - "use it or lose it" interpretation...

- that we are all given gifts according to our ability;
- that the gifts we are given are for using, for investing, and as we use or invest our gifts, God blesses and multiplies them - there is abundance, there is enough;
- and if we bury our gifts we will lose them.

And that interpretation works - it works when we are teaching this parable to young people or to people new to faith - it is a "safe" interpretation.

But it is not the only meaning, and when we peel back the layers, this parable may even become a bit confronting. Which, perhaps is a good thing - because I am convinced that Jesus' teaching was not trying to make us feel comfortable rather he challenges us to see our world and, in particular, God's realm, in a new light.

So let us look more closely.

First of all, we need to note that this parable is about money - not gifts and skills.

The word "talent" in Greek is a term for an amount of money.

We English speakers have shifted its meaning to include the reference to gifts and skills.

When Jesus told this story, he was talking about money.

A man is going on a journey leaving his servants in charge (25:14-15).

It would not have been unusual in Jesus' world for this to happen - and it reminds us that servants were not all washing clothes and feet; some servants were well-educated and held positions of trust in the household.

So the head of the household, leaves a sum of money with each of his servants.

And he goes away for a long time (25:19).

The first two servants trade with what they have.

And they double their money (25:16-17, 20, 22).

They are congratulated (25:21, 23).

The third servant, as it turns out, is afraid of his master (25:24-25), and so buried the money in the ground to protect it.

When the master returns, he is chastised and punished (25:26-30).

Which raises an important interpretive point for us - do we equate the man, the master, with God? If so, it becomes problematic when first his servant identifies him as harsh, and then the master lives up to the expectation by first berating him for not using his talents and then punishing him by throwing him "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (25:30)!

Is the servant being punished for his unwillingness to use his money or gifts?

Is the servant being punished for not wanting to risk someone else's hard-earned cash?

Is that who God is?

Another problem for me, is that if the landlord is equated to God, then we have God saying that those who have lots will be given more, and those who have little will have even the little they have taken away (25:29) - which simply doesn't fit with the call throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and then picked up by Jesus to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless.

There is another problem in this story for Jesus' Jewish audience. The master says to the "wicked and lazy slave" (25:26) that even investing in the bank would have been better than burying the money in the ground (25:27) but charging and earning interest from other Jewish people would be breaking God's laws so unless he was suggesting investing with a gentile banker, that would not be OK. Either way, this suggestion would have been at the very least surprising to Jesus' disciples, if not confronting.

So what do we do with this parable if many of our comfortable assumptions are not as comfortable or accurate as we first thought?

What if this parable is not so much about what the kingdom of God is, but rather is about what the very real consequences of living in God's realm might be?

Remember, the author of Matthew's gospel places this story right before Jesus is arrested. What if, the choice of the third servant was really about choosing to not participate in the economy of exploitation and capital gain? And when that choice is confronted by the master who lives by the rules of the world, the servant pays a heavy price.

In that reading, the master is everything God is not - the master is harsh and demanding, his power and wealth is frightening to the servant whose livelihood depends on this man - isn't this the reality of how the world works - in Jesus' time and still today?

The servant who chooses to not risk the trading floor, who chooses instead to simply protect what is, takes the cautious approach.

The master's response draws attention to the injustice of the system, and the servant finds himself punished and cast aside because he refuses to participate in a world of exploitation and unearned financial gain.

Maybe the description of this servant as "wicked and lazy" is more about how the world interprets his actions than it is about how God sees him.

The servant's non-violent resistance puts him in danger when the master takes his actions as a slight on his power and wealth. The master's reaction is very real when power and wealth is challenged, or worse, exposed for the transient mirage it is.

If we read the parable this way, this is about the consequence we sometimes face when we choose the kingdom path over the way of the world - it is hard, we risk being assessed by the world's standards and punished by a world that simply doesn't get what we are on about.

Perhaps then this parable is not so much trying to tell us what to do, it is not about being a good neighbour or a lost son, but perhaps it offers wisdom and honest insight into the very real and dangerous consequences of living into God's realm.

Matthew's Jesus follows this parable with the story about separating the sheep and the goats where the ones who gave food or a drink, who welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, who care for the sick and visit people in prison - they are the ones who inherit God's realm while those who refused to do such things are banished to "eternal fire" - another of Matthew's graphic images (25:31-46).

So I wonder... perhaps this parable is not just about using our gifts or investing our money wisely, perhaps it is not about that at all? Perhaps it is about refusing to participate in the exploitation of others, as costly as that might be for us.

Lord God

we thank you that you have made each of us different.

Each of us unique.

Each differently abled.

Each with something to contribute to your work in the world.

So help us not to compare ourselves with others but to know that we are enough just as we are.

Remind us that no one else can do what we can and that if we hold back, your work and the world will not be complete.

Give us courage to choose your way even when the world screams at us to conform.

God who created us,

we offer our whole selves to you, may we reflect your life in the world we serve. Amen.

Spill The Beans, Issue 36 , Resources for Pentecost 24, 15 November 2020, p.113, adapted

Ben Myers's Ten Rules for Preaching the Parables

Rule #1: Don't assume that God is necessarily one of the characters in the parable.

Rule #2: Don't assume that the parable is trying to tell you how to improve your life.

Rule #3: Don't assume that you're the goodie in the story (and that other people are the baddies).

Rule #4: If you can explain the whole parable without mentioning the words "kingdom of God," you're probably doing it wrong.

Rule #5: If it ends up having anything to do with going to heaven when we die, you're probably doing it wrong

Rule #6: If Jesus seems more like a headmaster giving orders than like a comedian cracking jokes, you're probably doing it wrong.

Rule #7: If you feel perfectly confident and untroubled while expounding the parable, you're probably doing it wrong.

Rule #8: If your sermon on the parable leaves people with nothing to look forward to and nothing to hope for, you're probably doing it wrong.

Rule #9: Now go back and repeat Rule 3 (because every preacher forgets this at least once in every sermon).

Rule #10: Finally, if you've preached a lousy sermon, just remember: as long as the parable was read aloud before you started, it won't be a total loss.

Prof Ben Myers, Professor of Theology and Literature; Graduate Research School Director;
Acting Director of Research, Alphacrucis University College

<https://www.faith-theology.com/2014/02/10-rules-for-preaching-on-parables.html>

Responding

Sing - Let Us Talents and Tongues Empty (TIS 537)

And so we sing - a song we sometimes sing after Communion, a song that reminds us that Jesus' life enables us to be about the work of offering love in the world.

Let us talents and tongues employ,	at the table he sets the tone,
reaching out with a shout of joy;	teaching people to live to bless,
bread is broken, the wine is poured,	love in word and in deed express.
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.	<i>Jesus lives again...</i>

*Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!
Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,
pass the Word around: loaves abound!*

Jesus calls us in, sends us out
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,
gives us love to tell, bread to share;
God-Immanuel everywhere.
Jesus lives again...

Christ is able to make us one,

© Frederick Herman Kaan

Prayer for Others (Val Mason)

Loving God, we cannot predict when we will be most needed. None of us knows when our gifts and skills will match the needs and hopes of another, but we pray we will be children of the light.

Prepare us, God, to be ready to serve when the time is right and name the injustices in our community and our world. May we be sensitive to the needs and hurts of others. May we be awake to the suffering that remains silent and hidden, which we offer into the silence now.

Silent prayer.

Encourage us, God, and allow us to build each other up, reminding each other again and again that we are called to this. We are called to be witnesses and shine a light on every injustice until your kin-dom come.

We need each other in this work, as much as we need your love and grace, O God. Fill us with your hope for this world and bless us with joy in the struggle for love and justice. May we dance and sing into your kin-dom. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 19 November 2023, p.160

Offering

As we have received, so we consider our response...

In the end, it is not about how much we have collected in earthly treasures.

In the end, it is what we did with those treasures, how we used them to support and encourage others to build the reign of God.

In the end, it is not about us as individuals but about us as a community.

Our offering is a practical and symbolic reminder that we are in the business of kin-dom building together.

Let us pray...

Thank you for this community and for the responsibility of being your people.

Forgive us for the times when we have tucked away and hidden our gifts and talents from the world.

As a community, help us support and encourage each other so we can share all of our gifts for and to your glory.

Bless these gifts, seen and unseen so that they might be a blessing to others. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 19 November 2023, p.160

Sending

Sing - May The God of Hope (Seasons 6-30)

We go singing a song that reminds us that God goes with us as we pray, work, sing and share joy in the world.

May the God of hope go with us every day,
filling all our lives with love and joy and
peace.

May the God of justice speed us on our
way,
bringing light and hope to every land and
race.

*Praying, let us work for peace,
singing, share our joy with all.
Working for a world that's new,
faithful when we hear Christ's call.*

God will be our shepherd as we go our
way,

and will not forsake us when we go astray.
Even though the load of life is hard to bear,
we must not forget that God is always
there.

Praying, let us work for peace...

May the God of healing free the earth from
fear,
freeing us for peace, both treasured and
pursued.

May the God of love keep our commitment
clear

to a world restored, to human life renewed.

Praying, let us work for peace...

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Stanza 2: Ann Mitchell. Copyright © Choristers Guild.

Sending

Our faith asks much of us,
sometimes it can feel too much.

As you go from our time together know that you are enough.

Your presence and faithfulness are a great witness to God's love.

Spill The Beans, Issue 36, Resources for Pentecost 24, 15 November 2020, p.114, adapted

Blessing

So let me send you with a Franciscan blessing...

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers,
half-truths, superficial relationships,
so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer
from pain, rejection, starvation, and war,
so that you may reach out to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in
this world,
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 2A, Resources for 19 November 2023, p.160

Liturgy adapted from material from:

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Rev Kath Merrifield
19 November 2023