

Service of Morning Worship –Sunday 15th November 2020

2nd Sunday before Advent.

Introduction

Grace and peace to us from God.
May he fill us with truth and joy.

We pray together:

Loving Lord,
fill us with your life-giving, joy-giving, peace-giving presence,
that we may praise you now with our lips, in our hearts
and all day long with our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Confession

The word of God is living and active. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart. All is laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we give account. And so, we confess our sins in penitence and faith, thankful of the assurance of God's forgiveness.

Our God, for love of you we desire to hate and forsake all sins
by which we have ever displeased you;
and we resolve by the help of your grace
to commit them no more;
and to avoid all opportunities of sin.
Help us to do this, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son to be our Saviour
forgive us our sins and make us holy to serve him in the world, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

Readings

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While



people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers, and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Matt 25: 14-30

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 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. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

"After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 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.'

"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!'

"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.'

"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!'

"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. So, I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

"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? 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.'

"So, take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 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. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'



Sermon

More on Getting Ready

Last week we looked at the very real importance of getting ready for the return of Jesus Christ.....and we always have to remember that **it is** going to happen one day. Many parts of the Old Testament point to his coming the first time; nobody knew when that would happen – but it did. Even if someone doesn't believe that Jesus is the Son of God and THE Saviour of the world, it is a proven fact that Jesus was a real historical person, just like Alexander the Great or Henry VIII.

So, if the Bible said that he was coming the first time, and he did, we need to take things seriously when the Bible tells us he's coming again, because he will. However, again, we don't know when that will be; and we must not be fooled by anyone who says that they know when it will be because they don't.

Our Thessalonian reading refers to the occasion as 'the day of the Lord'. This 'day of the Lord' is a future event when God will intervene directly and dramatically in world affairs. It was predicted and discussed often in the Old Testament where we're told that the day will include both punishment and blessing. It will be a day when Jesus Christ will judge sin and set up his eternal kingdom.

Last week our Gospel reading told us the story of the 10 virgins to help clarify what it means to be ready for Jesus' return. No parable, by itself, can completely describe what our preparation needs to be.

So, our parable today gives us another aspect of how we need to be prepared: and in this parable the key characters are a master and his 3 servants. The master decides to divide his money (talents) among his servants according to their abilities – important point!!

In other words, no-one received more, or less, than they could handle. Each was given exactly the right amount that they could cope with to get the job he had given them done. Hence, if the servant failed in their assignment, their excuse could not be that they were overwhelmed. Failure would only be due to laziness or disregard (or even hatred) towards the master.

For us today what are these talents? Well, they represent every resource we are given from God: because, make no mistake, it is God who gives us time, gifts and every other resource according to our abilities, and he expects us to invest them wisely until he returns.

We are responsible to use well what God has given us. The issue is not how much we have, but how well we use what we have.

Let me give you an example using John and me.

John has a real gift in solving most of our maintenance problems here at church. He not only has the skills and abilities required to fix things, but he also gives his time to do them – and a very good job he does too.

I would be completely clueless: but I can usually use bits and pieces of all sorts of things to aesthetically beautify our surroundings and I too give my time to use my gift.

If we tried to swap our talents it would be a disaster: we all need to use the talents God



has given to us and not waste what we've got, wishing we had the gifts of somebody else.

Back to the parable: at first glance, as we read it, we can tend to feel sorry for servant number 3 when the master returns and calls them all to account. We might even think that he had a raw deal: but is that actually the case?

The first 2 servants give back what they had been given plus the extra they had gained by putting their talents to good use. They had worked hard and were motivated to please their master. They are commended – 'good and faithful servant: come and share my happiness' the master tells them.

Now, we must remember that all 3 servants knew that the master would be coming back. All 3 servants knew that the talents that they had been given were to be used in the master's service. All 3 servants knew that their master didn't stand for any messing! But only 2 took the situation seriously and grew the master's resources.

Here's another example using John. He used his gift with practical things all through his working life: but when he retired, he could have downed tools and said that's me finished. Instead he continues to use all that knowledge and skill, acquired over the years, in God's service here at St James: and because of that this place glorifies God in greater measure. When he finished secular work, he didn't bury his gift: he continued using it in a specific capacity for the glory of God.

Contrary to servants 1 and 2, servant 3 was only thinking of himself. He played it safe; didn't take any risks; didn't use his talent for God, or anyone else by the sounds of it! He knew the hard expectations of his master and tried to protect himself, thinking he'd be OK.

He was judged for his self-centredness; and called 'a wicked, lazy servant'.

Regardless of whether people believe it or not, the fact remains that we are all created in the image of God.

We are all created to glorify God with our lives.

But God gave us free will to either do that.....or not! When Jesus comes back (and regardless of what anyone else may say, he is coming back), like the master in the parable, he will settle accounts with us.....and judge us accordingly.

We must take this seriously and be ready.....because we don't know, not just the day of Christ's return, but also the day of our own deaths.....or the deaths of our loved ones for whom we should be praying. We know that Jesus' return will come suddenly but so too can ours, or a loved one's, death. How we live our lives matters and effects our eternity. Do we live our lives to be a good person.....or do we live our lives to glorify God?

There is a difference!

I challenge us all to live our lives in such a way as to show others that glorifying God through them is the best way to live.....so much so that others will want to do the same, and be ready for 'the day of the Lord' themselves.



Creed

Let us declare our faith in God:

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Intercessions

2 Sunday before Advent (2020)

Generous God, you share yourself in diverse gifts.

Help us to use what you have given us to grow your Kingdom wherever you have placed us in the world.

We thank you for all those in our lives who are examples for us, and actively demonstrate to us, how to make good use of all our resources.

Keep us from being guilty about only being concerned for ourselves, rather than always looking beyond, into our communities, seeking ways to show your love in both the practical and the spiritual.

Protect us from any fear that paralyses Godly action for the good of others.

May laziness or unconcern be absent in all our doings because all things come from you and of your own do we give you.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer

Generous God, your bountiful love blesses the earth.

Inspire wise and fair stewardship of these riches. Turn all hearts from greed and abuse of your creation.

Thank you for all those who work tirelessly to preserve natural habitats and control climate change.

We pray particularly for those governments around the world whose policies show no regard for the care of the planet. Change their mind sets and vision to the realisation that a fresh, selfless approach is necessary and urgently needs to be implemented.

We pray for ourselves, that we will play our part in conserving energy, recycling and reducing waste.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer

Generous God, communities around the world are still struggling with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, and the restrictions placed on them to combat its spread.

We ask that you will be sovereign and eradicate this disease soon so that normal social interaction can resume.



We ask that you will give us all patience as we endeavour to adhere to the rules imposed upon us at this time for the good of everyone. Be especially gracious we pray for all those who are lonely and isolated. May this be an opportunity for you to make yourself known to them.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer

Generous God, we give you thanks for all the skill and talent of medical practitioners and their ministering to all those who are sick, whether in body, mind or spirit. In your mercy be with those who call upon you in their frailty and distress. We name those known to us silently to you.....Pour out your healing blessing and mercy upon them now, and throughout the days to come, that they will feel strengthened to cope with their circumstances and know an inner peace previously absent.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen**

Let us now continue in prayer using the words our Saviour 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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Blessing

**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ. Amen.**

