

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 15th November 2020

Zephaniah 1.7,12-end; Psalm 90.12-end; Thessalonians 5.1-11; Matthew 25.14-30

“You have to speculate to accumulate,” goes the saying. However I prefer the version which says, “You need to invest to grow.” You have to invest hard work in a garden if you want it to grow as you wish. You have to invest money and knowhow in a business if you want it to grow. You have to invest time and care in friendships if you want them to grow.

And as Jesus teaches in today’s parable from the gospel of St Matthew, if you want the Kingdom of God to grow, if you want churches to grow, if you want to grow personally in spirit and in faith, you need to invest spiritually and in ministry, using the gifts that God has given you. The parable of the talents is not really about money, it’s about the gifts that God has given each and every one of us, for each of us to play our own part in growing the Kingdom of God wherever we are. And in this parable Jesus teaches that if we faithfully use what God has given us, God’s Kingdom will indeed grow.

As with many of Jesus’ parables, there is a sting in the tail, a warning against being faithless. At one level it seems to be uncharacteristic of Jesus to be disparaging the little guy with only one talent; unfair and cruel even. But the person given the single talent is not necessarily the little guy. He could be any one of us who, in the parable makes not just one but two serious mistakes. One mistake is about ourselves and the other is about God.

Firstly, this person gets God seriously wrong. The Kingdom of God is not being built on the horrible idea that God is like a harsh man reaping where he does not sow, and gathering where he has not scattered. The God revealed by Jesus is just not like that. The Kingdom of God does not work like that. The Kingdom is all about God investing himself lovingly, faithfully, sacrificially and generously, in people and in communities, so that they may grow in the ways of his Kingdom; in love and faith and sacrifice and generosity. In getting God wrong, the one given the single talent is actually being very deeply unfaithful to God.

But secondly, this person also gets his own status in the Kingdom wrong. He assumes that because he thinks he has been given less that he is worth less, and has nothing to give. One of the features of the Kingdom of God is, whether or not you have been given massive gifts to use in God’s service or modest gifts to use in God’s service, they are all still equally and vitally important. Everyone has their part to play. The single talent is as important as the five talents. All are called to be faithful, and being faithful to Jesus is not about hiding away for fear of making mistakes.

So for example in the life of a church, just because you are not a great preacher, doesn’t mean that you do not have gifts which can encourage others in faith and love. Just because you don’t have lots of money, doesn’t mean you can’t be generous in proportion to what you have been given. Just because others seem to have more faith than you, doesn’t mean that you do not have your own vital, faithful part to play in growing God’s Kingdom.

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The message of the parable of the Talents is that everyone has their part to play if they want to be part of what God is growing. Holding back not only holds back the growth of the Kingdom, but tragically holds those people back personally and spiritually too. They don't grow either.

The most surprising thing about this parable is actually how positive it is. When people do have a go, when people do invest, when people do go out on a limb and take a risk, for the Kingdom, for Jesus, in God's grace the Kingdom grows. For God honours such true investment in his kingdom. In God's grace, the one who invested five, made five more, and the one who invested two made two more.

Of course it's still holds that not everything works, not everything is of God, and sometimes things simply go wrong. And there is no merit in trying to do something, for which you are really not suited. There is room for wise self-knowledge here. One of the things that is often observed of successful entrepreneurs, is that they are not afraid of failure. Some things work, some things don't; it's just the way of things, and the important thing is to keep on investing anew. Most of us are usually so full of fear of failure, that we are reluctant to have a go, to risk everything. Many people have been so knocked back by failures, that they are just afraid to have another go.

But, it seems, that God thinks differently. He is very much the God of second chances and third chances. He wants his children to have a go, to explore what they can do for his Kingdom, and to grow in faith and spirit. He wants his children to learn from their mistakes, to get back on the horse after a fall, confident that whether they meet success or failure, they remain held in the love of God come what may. The message of this parable is actually hugely positive. Invest and in God's grace the Kingdom will grow, but the flipside is that fear of failure is no excuse for inaction.

The invitation is for each and every one of us, whatever gifts we have been given, whether great or modest, to take our part and become part of a growing kingdom that will change the world, and change us. Whether we meet success or failure, however those fickle things are ultimately measured, we can be confident that, in his faithfulness God will redeem our mistakes, and bless our successes, if we will let him. Amen.

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