

“Talents Sermon”

[Delivered by Roger Verrall Licensed Lay Minister on July 31 at 8am Communion, on August 6th at 10 am Joint HC with the URC and on August 6th at the 6 pm Evening Prayer]

Gospel Text - Matthew 25.14-30

This morning we are moving on to our seventh window in our series of sermons on the parable windows and it is the one depicting the story of the Talents or rather depicting a particular scene from the parable.

The passage, which immediately precedes the one about the talents, in St Matthews Gospel, is the story of the ten bridesmaids, and that is also the window next to it.

Both are about the issues of the Kingdom of God - the ten bridesmaids deals with the question of waiting and being prepared and the talents about being productive and working or doing.

Both anticipate the Lord's return and are naturally linked and teach what should characterise those who eagerly wait for the coming again of the Lord in whatever way they expect it.

They address the offering of life in the service of the Lord.

And we need to remember that the early Christians thought that Christ's return was imminent and these were therefore matters of great urgency.

In the 21st century, we might just be tempted to be a little less urgent in our hope or anticipation of Christ's

return, and so being prepared for it also perhaps carries a little less urgency.

Yet for our time there may be another reason for us to be found hard at work, to remain alert and to avoid burying our gifts or talents in a field while we wait for our master's return.

So what, specifically is this parable of the Talents all about and what aspects does the window focus on especially?

First I think we need to think about the meaning of Talent. Does anyone know what talent means?

In its very original form talent was an ancient unit of mass equivalent to 1 cubic foot of water.

It was later applied to money and 1 Talent actually meant a talent of gold weighing about the same as a person i.e. 50 kg or 110 lbs – a lot of gold.

So it wasn't actually coinage but tradable gold – perhaps similar to the gold standard that formed the basis of our currency at one time.

But also in equivalence terms 1 talent was roughly equally to 6000 denarii and 1 denarii was a labourer's daily wage. So five talents was equal to a lifetime of work. And even one talent represented much wealth and it was certainly not something you could take into the local shop and expect change when you bought your weekly groceries. It was a sort of market commodity.

So in our story we heard about the man, and evidently a very wealthy man, who was going on a very long journey and he entrusted different amounts of talents to his servants to look after while he was away, according to their abilities.

Two servants managed to double their money but the third was so anxious that he hid it until the master returned.

And our window picks up scene where the man has returned --- and he seems to be depicted in the window as a king, since he is wearing a crown. This perhaps picks up the point that this parable reflects that early return of Christ to earth and this could also be taken to symbolise Christ the King for us.

So the man has returned and he is asking the three servants to come before him and explain what they have done with the Talents that he entrusted them with. He is holding a scroll, no doubt with details of what he had given them, so that he can compare the amount they have returned. He is dressed in fine clothes and is shown sitting on a seat, in a building, which looks like a temple with candles and other fineries again perhaps again supporting the image of Christ the King. Perhaps the list he holds even represents what we have done with our lives. !!!

The first servant has a very big bag, equivalent to 10 Talents, the second has a smaller bag equivalent to 4 Talents and the youngest has the very small bag containing just the original single Talent. He is also apparently looking a bit more anxious than the other two perhaps even guessing what the master will say to him.

We know how all three will be addressed and treated.

“ Well done thou good and faithful servant” is what the man says to the first two, but when the third gets to give his excuses he is treated very roughly, and the talent that he had, is taken away and he is then banished to darkness.

I liked also the corner decoration design on this window, which depicts acorns and oak leaves so perhaps there was some symbolism in the mind of the designer to reflect that out of tiny acorns spring mighty oaks which parallels the growth that is possible from the talents received.

Of course the parable is about money and how these three servants have used it. So it is about questions of judgement and trust as well. Judgements on us and judgements we make and the way we trust others and the way we respond to the trust other place in us.

But the word talent today refers more usually to the God-given gifts that we have, that we have been entrusted with, and which we try to use in the service of God.

It is about ability and opportunity.

And we are also reminded by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount that we shouldn't be hiding our light under a bushel.

Sometimes we are very productive in the way we offer our time and talents but on others we are less effective.

Perhaps there is always a bit of the third servant in all of us -- anxious about what we do.

I must confess that I do have more some sympathy for that third servant and he does look vulnerable. But I do not believe that God really wants to banish us into the darkness when we don't always make full use of our talents. I think He really wants us in his kingdom.

In fact many people do not always realise what talents they may have and need to be encouraged and nurtured to use them.

It is possible that some may not be aware of what they really can achieve.

It is surely also a responsibility that we have as a part of the whole body of Christ to help others in their journey towards God and one way is to motivate them in the use of their talents. It is not simply a case of us taking care of ourselves but also serving and encouraging our brothers and sisters.

Just turning again to the world of money -- there are some who take more risks than others -- speculating, looking always for high returns, whereas others are more conservative and may keep the money in a simple savings account others may still prefer to hang on to it as cash. So there is always a wide spectrum of the response in any situation.

However the message coming from the parable is that we should not be lazy and we should not just try and preserve what we have -- we have faith but it should not just be not static- it is something we should develop. Our spirituality should be deepened, our sacrificial service should be extended and opportunities for witness should be seized. That doesn't mean we should be careless or reckless or ride rough shod over people.

So perhaps the main message is to be faithful in using the talents and opportunities, which the Lord has given us and to be diligent in what we do and find a way of dealing with negligence, which is firm but always looking for a win situation, even under the most difficult circumstances.

We are quite simply stewards and when the time of reckoning comes it is not a question of how many talents we have accumulated but how faithful we have been.

If we are in and of the Kingdom of God here on earth we know that the Lord has given us all some ability with which to serve. So we need to be prepared for the moment when the Lord comes again and we need to be productive in the intervening time.

Perhaps the question we have to consider is "What will be said to us ". Will it be 'well done thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord'

So it is about staying awake, being alert and working with what we have been given. At the same time we need to conquer fears of change or fears of trying something new.

Its quite amazing what we can do at times, what we are able to offer, as we strive towards the joy of that abundant life.

Let us pray,

Help us Lord to always strive to use the talents you have given us to your service and be diligent and faithful in our daily lives and at times take risks in your name.

Amen.

