

Sunday 15 November 2020

Call to worship: Be children of light, be children of day. Come now and worship, come now and pray.

Hymn – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

Prayer of adoration & confession

We praise you, life-giving God, for revealing yourself to us through beauty and grace. Your life enables ours and you entrust your gifts to us and empower us, through your Holy Spirit to use them effectively. We praise you for enabling us to recognise talent and capability in others and in ourselves, things which seek the common good. May we never fear failure but rather rejoice that it is you we serve, and delight in you as you delight in us. We pray in the name of your Son, our Friend and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Forgive us Lord, when we have not trusted our gifts because we have not trusted you. When we have been cautious in our own strength rather than relying upon you. Forgive us and help us to help one another to be the people you know that we can be. Amen.

Hymn – God of glory we exalt your name.

Bible reading: Matthew 25: 14-30

Sermon

How often we must have heard this parable and likened it to the gifts that we might have and the use thereof. We have, like the master, thought well of the one who made so much profit and despised the one who thought burial of talent was the appropriate thing to do. You know, there could be reasons, explanations, excuses for the action or inaction of that third person. The master does not give opportunity for explanation and seems impatient to get that person out of his sight. In fact the master does not seem a particularly likeable character and we perhaps should not see him as representing God. Living in a world which seems to applaud those who make pots of money and looks down on those who are poverty-stricken, maybe we should rather question the motives of those who seek riches above all else. In other parts of the Gospel, Jesus makes it quite clear that money should not be the over-riding *raison d'être* of his followers but rather the willingness to lay aside all else for the sake of the Kingdom.

We know however, that God does give gifts to his disciples, which we understand to be for the building of God's Kingdom. What do those gifts look like? How do we describe them?

I came across the story of someone called Dorothy Day and thought I would share it with you. She was born in Brooklyn, New York and became interested in radical social causes as a way to help workers and the poor when a student. In 1916 she started work as a journalist on socialist newspapers, participated in protest movements and struggled through a turbulent private life. Her Catholic faith began to take form after the birth of her daughter in 1926 and in 1932, whilst covering the Hunger March in Washington DC for some Catholic magazines, she understood how society could serve the poor and the unemployed. She founded the Catholic Worker newspaper with Peter Maurin, spawning a movement of houses of hospitality and farming communes replicated throughout the USA and in other countries.

At the Catholic Worker, Dorothy lived a life faithful to the injunctions of the gospel. Often the newspaper quoted GK Chesterton's famous observation that Christianity hadn't really failed – it had never really been tried. Dorothy's life was spent trying. Her passion was for those on the

forgotten margins, and her pilgrimage ended at Maryhouse in New York where she died among the poor.

That's someone who had a talent and pushed and exercised it as much as possible, through Christ, for others.

It sometimes strikes me that in the parable we heard, the third person was not so much punished for the lack of profit, but for the lack of trying. There are times when however hard we try, we simply fail, through circumstances beyond our control. Today, we seem to have a lot of emphasis on mental health and one common problem we are told, is that of self esteem or rather the lack of it. I know for a fact that if Christian folk in a room were asked what their particular talent is, a high percentage would say that they hadn't got one, or would try to deflect attention or wrongly claim it was something like sweeping the floor. Don't get me wrong – we do need floor sweepers! But so often we are prone to hide our talents or deny them. The apostle Paul gives a great list of evangelists and teachers, healers and speakers in tongues, prophets, apostles and miracle-workers. But please note that this is not a complete list of gifts and graces, God does I firmly believe have individual gifts for each person through the Holy Spirit.

And what is more, there are also Fruits. You may sometimes think of these things as gifts but actually each and every Christian should have these things developing in their lives as we seek to live more and more like Jesus Christ. We are not called to be 'gentle, meek and mild' or at least not at all the time! Our lives should reflect the "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self control which Paul lists to the Galatians and those are available to us all, no not just available but are things we should strive for. These things should pulsate through us, we should shine with them in our dealings inside and outside the church. Now there is a challenge for us! How can we as a church so show Christ, that transformation is inevitable? Let us pray that it will be so.

Hymn – Called by Christ to be disciples.

Prayer

We give thanks O God, for those whose gifts and talents bring joy to others; who inspire others; who meet the needs of others. Gracious God, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who have made bad investments and decisions and so have lost everything; for those who have invested that which did not belong to them and whose decisions have serious consequences for the lives of others. Gracious God, hear our prayer.

We pray for the church throughout the world, that Christian people will use your gifts generously, lovingly and to your glory. Gracious God, hear our prayer.

We remember before God those who are in particular need of our prayers today; the sick, the lonely, the emergency services, those who are bereaved. Gracious God, hear our prayer.

Lastly we pray for ourselves, Lord God would you so touch us with your Spirit, that the gifts you give would be recognised and used, lovingly and graciously to make Christ known. Gracious God, hear our prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided.

Blessing - Living and true God, help us to be people who reflect your call of discipleship, who are discerning in our choices, wise and humble. May the light of a prayerful heart guide us in all we do and say. Amen.