**15.11.2020 – MATTHEW 25, 14-30**

**Judgment**

**Generosity**

**Grace**

"Living (as we do) in the interregnum (in between times), we should be faithful with the resources given to us. Rather than burying them, we should be investing them. That is, we should look at life through the lens of abundance rather than scarcity."

The absent master of Jesus’ parable recalls the apparently absent God of Zephaniah’s oracle – but he will surely return!

This parable is about more than just what you can do, or what God has gifted you with, it’s a parable about what are you going to do in those moments where you clearly know what it means to represent Christ in a moment and you don’t do so.

Often we hear this parable and think about it as a stewardship lesson of investment, or a reminder to use those skills that we have rather than hide them away. And while these are reasonable and worthwhile perspectives, they fail to capture the larger picture and drama of the context of this parable about the end of time, kingdom of God, and judgment. We might think about it more as a parable about callings, the “positions in which God has placed us to make a difference; opportunities to be influential.”

The three slaves were entrusted with huge sums and clearly expected to trade. The different amounts of money may represent the different gifts and abilities each disciple has, or the privileges and opportunities of the Kingdom of heaven. Being ready for the master’s return means carrying out whatever responsibilities he has given us – he decides what those differing responsibilities will be.

The reward for faithful trading is not to be pensioned off with a lump sum, but to be given even greater responsibilities. Both the industrious and resourceful slaves are given an identical commendation – despite the difference in the amounts they had handled. The third slave has been gripped by fear and inertia: in ‘playing safe’ he secures his own downfall.

Money under the mattress does not keep pace with inflation and loses its value in real terms. Those who try to ‘preserve’ ways of doing theology or worship or ministry unchanged are left with devalued currency. Faith is given to be developed, spiritual understanding to be deepened, sacrificial service to be extended and opportunities for witness to be seized.

The kingdom of God is not about people terrorised into submission; part of salvation is being given the grace to grow up. Today’s parable of the talents reminds us of this expectation in our new life. God expects us to make the most of all we have been given rather than hiding our gifts away, either out of a mock modesty or a fear which insults the loving justice of God. All these gifts we have been provided with can be used and enjoyed, both for the encouragement and building-up of the Church and in the service we are called to give in the world. This carries with it not terror but peace and joy, together with the maturity of responsibility.

The good news is, we have this parable to inspire us to choose another way; to stare fear in the face and stand on the side of Christ; to be bold enough to take a stand in the face of what tries to render us helpless and say, “not today.” This is what it means to be the church. The church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.

As people of faith, we are called to take risks, not dig holes. This is one of our greatest callings as those who follow Jesus and live in anticipation of his return. To live into the kingdom of heaven that these parables describes means being ready to present ourselves to God not as maintainers of the bare minimum, but as faithful investors who lived fully into the lives God gave us. Amen.