

## Sermon: Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2017

### Call to worship

We gather as the family of God,  
brothers and sisters of Christ, children of the Spirit.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other,  
as indeed you are doing.

**Reading:** Matthew 25:14–30 (NRSV) *The Parable of the Talents*

**Reading:** 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 (NRSV)

### Address

“... I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.” Matt. 25:25

Jesus, the master of the Church, has left but has given gifts to those that remain to support, encourage and develop the Church. Some have more gifts than others, but everyone has gifts.

Some folk recognise the gifts that God has given them, apply them, offer themselves to the task of being Church and in effect double the outcome. They take their inherent abilities, the inspiration of God, step forward in faith, and Church happens. God’s dream of justice, peace and love becomes more apparent in the world.

Other folk can be scared by all of this. They may see all of the busy people around them and try to hide. If they think about doing something to support the Church they jump to the hardest task and, as they feel unable to do it, they use that as an excuse to not do anything.

“... I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.” Matt. 25:25

The parable also makes it clear that it was incredibly easy for the first two servants to double their talents.

“The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents.”

These two servants went off immediately and doubled what the master had given them, and then waited around for the master’s return. The first two servants applied themselves, offered their abilities and the gifts God has given them, and the kingdom of God prospered. We are challenged to believe, that if we do take a risk for God’s sake, it will work to the good.

The third stewed over it all. They buried the gift that God had given them, agonized over the injustice of it all, and saw the gift as a burden, a chore, an imposition on them.

The first two are rewarded, and the third is punished. The third has God’s gift to them taken away and is thrown out of God’s kingdom. The master says it would have been better if the third servant had given the gift to others, who would have at least increased it a little.

“... I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground.” Matt. 25:25

The theme of Jesus’ departure and Christ’s return in our parable is also there in our reading from Thessalonians.

There are at least two ways of thinking about Christ’s return, and they are not incompatible. We have the grand image of what’s commonly called the second coming, with Christ descending from heaven.

Which we could interpret as the final event in history or the final event in our lives. It could be how the universe dies or it could be repeated as each and every one of us dies. It can be seen as either a universal event or a deeply personal event.

The other image we have for Christ's return comes from that other parable when the people who are again sent out to "weeping and gnashing of teeth" ask:  
'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?

And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" (Mt 25:37-39)

And they receive the reply: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' (Mt 25:40).

So here we have the image of Christ appearing to us in our daily lives. Within any encounter Christ could be present.

Our reading from Thessalonians reminds us that we will never know when Christ will return, but we should always be prepared for it. We'll never know when the universe ends or we will die, but we should always live so we can welcome it with a clear conscience. We'll never know if a chance encounter is with Christ, so we should always strive to react as if it was.

So, we are to live prepared for Christ. And to be prepared is to always seek to follow his example, to focus on him, to strive to live in faith, love and hope. To hold on to those final words of affirmation and guidance: Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

"... I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground." Matt. 25:25

We are called to not be afraid. But if we are still fearful, then we are strongly warned not to hide. If we can't overcome our fear, then our task is to encourage and support those that are not afraid. If we are afraid, and all we do is pass on that fear and hide away God's gift, then all you have is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" to look forward to.

We are called to not be afraid. Whether that is to have the courage to step beyond where we have been before, to take a chance on the unknown, we are called to do so in faith, love and hope.

Let me close with the words of the poem 'Risk' by Joseph P. Lawler

To laugh, is to risk playing the fool.

To weep, is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out to another, is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings, is to risk exposing our true selves.

To put your ideas, your dreams, before the crowd is to risk loss.

To love, is to risk not being loved in return.

To live, is to risk dying.

To hope, is to risk despair.

To try at all, is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken,  
Because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.

They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they simply cannot learn, change, feel, grow, love, live...

Chained by their attitudes they are slaves.

Only the person who risks is free.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. **Amen**

### **Blessing**

We are blessed, and we are called to be blessings.

May our time and talents be put to the tasks of God's kingdom,  
as we follow the way of Christ, and live the life of the Spirit. **Amen**