

Sermon for Holmbury 15th November 2020

Good morning everyone, it is lovely to be with you this morning. My message today is based on our reading from Matthew 25: 14-30

My 8-year-old grand-daughter, Saffie and I were looking at the famous painting of God and Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. 'Is that really what God is like?' she asked. Thereafter followed an interesting discussion about how the Bible tells us that we are all made in God's image, male and female - so does God have a feminine side – and a long, grey beard? We all have an image of what God is like but is it the right one? Of course, we'll never know fully until we meet Him face to face, but the Bible does give us hints as to His character.

The character of the Master in our Bible passage today may be seen as God, as Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God, but who is this Master – is he the generous employer who entrusts his servants with huge amounts of his own money and then rewards the faithful servants with further responsibility and, as the Message version of the Bible puts it 'partnership' and a share in their Master's happiness?

Or is he the version that the 3rd servant describes, 'a harsh man' to be feared?

Jesus was in Jerusalem with his disciples and had been talking in the temple to the Scribes and Pharisees about many aspects of theology, including the nature of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus comes out of the temple, he speaks 'privately' to the disciples when they ask Him when the Kingdom will come. He talks about the signs of the 'end of the age' and then tells two parables about being prepared for His arrival. In our passage today, Jesus teaches us about faithfully using what God has given us and multiplying it for His glory and for His Kingdom.

The amount that the Master gives in the parable is huge! A talent was worth the equivalent of 20 years of a labourer's wage. Thousands of pounds! So even the smallest amount of one talent was an enormous amount for a servant to be trusted with. This seems to indicate a Master who had confidence in his servants and that he wanted them to be a part of his business – to use their skill and ingenuity to make use of these large sums of money. The Master is fair – the money is given to each servant 'according to his ability'.

Interestingly, the English word talent is derived from this use of the word in the Bible and the Greek word for the interest accrued on a sum of money, is offspring. Just as we want our children, our offspring, to grow and bear fruit, we invest in them – our love, our care, our knowledge and experience – we don't just leave them to get on with life on their own. In many cultures, children are still regarded as an investment for the future. They will grow up to take care of their elderly parents when they can no longer work to provide for the family.

What is money for? It is to be used, to be invested so that it may grow and be even more useful. To hide it away in the ground is indeed foolish and wasteful.

It seems that the Master is unduly cruel to the 3rd servant, but did his false view of his Master feed into his natural laziness and self-protection and stop him from making the most of the amazing opportunity he'd been offered? The Master was away for a long time – what did the 3rd servant do all that time? He 'went away', was fearful and inactive. He didn't want to take any risks or make any effort. By burying the money, he abjured any responsibility for it. The other two servants obviously worked hard to make the most of what they had been given. They took action immediately and started to make the money work for their Master – they wanted to please the one who had trusted them with so much.

So what is our view of the Master in this story – was he the generous giver who wants his servants to take responsibility and so give them the opportunity to share in his riches; or is he someone to be feared, whose requests are too much to be bothered with?

What then is our view of God? If we believe that **Jesus** shows us who God is, we see a nurturing, loving Master, who encourages and trusts his disciples to do His work, but he is also the one who is angry when his father's house is misused and is willing to give his life for justice and forgiveness. Not a wishy washy, anything-goes sort of Master, but a strong, fair and sometimes demanding Master. But one who knows and forgives our frailty and failures. We are asked to be faithful and productive servants – not because that will save us – only Jesus can do that. But because we love Him as the generous loving Master that He is and we are privileged to be invited to join Him in His work. To prepare for His Kingdom, to use the gifts and talents that He has given us, to multiply them and to glorify His name through them.

What has God given you to use in his service? Don't make the mistake of saying that nothing you have is worthy. You are created in God's image – there is something of Him in all of us, and there is something that God has uniquely gifted **you** with to contribute to His kingdom. We see examples of gifts in Paul's letter to the Colossians: Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Quiet strength, Patience, Forgiveness and above all LOVE. We may have gifts of Leadership, Organisation, Insight, Peace-making, Teaching or a Prayer Ministry. Whatever your particular gift, seek it out and invest in it, ask God what He would have you do and work to multiply that talent – remember He has given each of us according to our ability - He knows what we can handle and won't ask more than we are able to give or do. Don't fearfully bury your talent in the ground, courageously nurture it and you will be rewarded.

We are often, like the third servant, scared to fail – to fail requires humility and we often want to appear invincible, but we can learn so much from when things go wrong. Don't be afraid to fail, if we use failure positively, it can be a learning experience, not something to be feared. And we must forgive others when they fail: if God extends grace to us and forgives our sin, surely, we must do the same for others when they, like us, make mistakes. By building good relationships with others we can be understanding of their failures and they of ours and work together to put things right and to learn together.

And Jesus doesn't leave us to get on with it, He is with us all the way, His Spirit will encourage and strengthen us - as Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:13, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

May we see God for who He really is – a loving and generous Parent, who wants to reveal His gifts to us, His children and invites us to partner with Him in the work of His kingdom and to share in His joy when we are his faithful servants. May He give us courage, even when we fail, as we strive to discover, develop and use our talents in the service of His Kingdom.

Amen.