

Reflection for Sunday 15 November 2020

Second Sunday before Advent

Matthew 25: 14-30

We recognise Jesus as a master story-teller. He used parables to great effect, when teaching the crowds of people who followed him. Like many of the parables, the narrative we are reflecting upon this week, is rooted in familiar ground. Jesus hooked the crowd with a scenario they could readily identify with. This time, he began with a land-owner going on a journey, leaving his servants in charge of running his affairs in his absence. Those listening would nod their heads in understanding, for this is how things were done.

The landowner left his servants with money, with a number of talents according to the use he believed each would put them to. So to one servant, he gave 5 talents, to another 2 and to another just 1 talent.

Jesus had the attention of those around him. Everyone wanted to know what these servants would do with the money entrusted to them. They were eager to know how the story would unfold.

But, as with most of the parables, the conclusion of the story probably left his listeners feeling chastened and uncomfortable. The ending which saw the two enterprising servants rewarded for their efforts, and the third one cast into a place of darkness and punishment, leaves us as confused as the folk gathered around Jesus.

So perhaps it is helpful to remember that part of the art of story-telling, is to make use of techniques which deliberately provoke those who are listening. Exaggeration adds to the drama. It can be a mistake to look for too much realism, to get caught up in the detail and thereby miss the point all together. A parable is a story designed to make an impact in as powerful a way as possible!

Some in the crowd had come to Jesus in hope of finding their Saviour and Messiah. They would surely recognise God in the persona of the master and the people of Israel as his servants. There would be a gradual realisation that Jesus, as the Son of God, had come to take account of what these servants had been about. They had been entrusted with many gifts – with the Land of Israel, with the Law, with the life of the Temple and chance to show God's message of love for and through his chosen people.



Jesus was taking stock of their collective failure to bring these God-given gifts to fruition. Jesus showed his followers, openly and plainly, that poor stewardship would lead to privilege as well as responsibility being taken away.

And then, there is an underlying subtext to the story – that of individual failure to make best use of the talents and gifts each of us has from God. It can be a long process to make sense of our vocation. It can be difficult to understand what is being asked of us. But we are all blessed with special gifts which are unique to us. God allots talents to each of us, so that we may be a blessing to others.

Every calling is equally valid as long as we commit to making the best use of the precious gifts God has given us. Wherever we find ourselves, a life lived out in loving service and as part of God's plan, will always be exciting and a cause for celebration. And then, we trust that in time, it will bring us the joy of hearing the words, "well done, good and faithful servant".

Rowena Ashworth