

Preb Samantha Stayte

Second Sunday before Advent

St Matthew's

Zephaniah 1:7,12-end    1 Thessalonians 5:1-11    Matthew 25:14-30

In speaking and listening may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

In these last weeks of the Christian year, these last weeks of Kingdom season, we are hearing the parables of Jesus that the writer of Matthew's gospel records as some of his final teaching in Jerusalem before he gathers his disciples for their last supper, is arrested and crucified. This teaching is direct and exacting. In this chapter of Matthew there are a series of parables about the kingdom of heaven which call for followers of Jesus to be radical in the responsibility they are take up. Last week we heard about being responsible for keep the light shining, even as we wait for the time when all things will come under the sovereignty of God's love. Today we are offered the story of members of a household who respond differently to the responsibility for his property given to them by the master.

I wonder how you react when you hear this story?

If you are anything like me perhaps it makes you feel rather uncomfortable.

I think that might be Jesus' point.

If you take a moment to sit with the story its strangeness becomes more apparent.

First: the master entrusts his property to his slaves.

Clearly slavery was an accepted part of the cultural life of the first century of the Common Era but I think it is always important to be sensitive to the disruptive way that Jesus uses the image of a slave. In Jesus' parables the master of the slaves sits with them, serves them, entrusts his property to them: in effect he dissolves the oppressive relationship of master and slave and creates something new.

As I imagine the master giving out his property to his talented slaves, I am reminded of what the Archbishop said last week about Jesus' first actions: he calls disciples to repent: to turn back towards God's way of doing things and then he calls them to follow and share in his work – he calls us to be co-operative partners in returning all that is into the knowledge of God's love.

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God entrusts his whole property, the whole creation to God's creatures. Creatures – us – are those who depend wholly on our Creator for all that we are and all that we have, for life itself. We whole are totally dependent are invited by God to use all that belongs to God as if it were ours, that total level of sharing.

The question at the heart of this parable then is, how will we, you and I, use what we have been given?

And put like that it is a pretty exacting question.

Returning to the parable, I wonder where you are in the story?

The master gives out his property according to the ability of the slaves. In that wonderful co-incidence of language the name for the currency offers us a word that directs us to deeper reflection. The slaves are given "talents".

So what has God handed uniquely to you? What gifts of God have you received to use as if they belonged to you for the good of creation, for the good of all things, for the good of the little corner of God's kingdom in which we find ourselves?

Jesus is encouraging us to take seriously what we have been given and to enjoy using our gifts and talents to enable the cumulative growth of love in creation. Its worth noting that in this parable the focus is on valuing by active use what has been giving not weighing up whether it is enough. The gifts each one of us has are sufficient for the particular work in which Jesus desires us to share.

Let's look at how the slaves react: two take seriously the master's confidence in them. They use the talents in his name generously, ambitiously, wisely, abundantly. In their use of the master's property they reflect what they know of him. They use his property as he would. The third is paralysed by fear and buries what has been given. He reflects what he believes about the master in his own behaviour – his failure to use the gifts from the master is also a failure in his knowledge of what the master is all about.

I wonder how our exercising of gifts and talents reflects the picture of God that we have? Perhaps we need to pray for God's grace to help us truly to realise God's boundless generosity, God's desire for the good of all creation, God's unconditional boundless love. This is not easy. For all that unconditional love sounds beautiful, it is the human tendency to reject it, to find it unbearable, to fear it. Jesus death on the cross shows us how we push the bearer of unconditional love away.

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The urgency at the heart of these stories is the urgency of love and light and life in a world that suffers from hatred, darkness and death.

As we imagine the master sharing out his property perhaps we can think back to the times we have received from God – times of loving, of finding light, of finding deep strength and a sense of life even when things were difficult. Growing in our knowledge of God's generosity, kindness and mercy is what Jesus call his followers to do.

Then how can we use whatever we have actively to show signs of the generosity of God in our own lives?

This might be about the way we each use our money and resources, our time, our particular skills, our commitment to prayer, our friendships or work lives as gifts given to us by God to use like God would.

I wonder what difference it makes to the way we spend the day if in the morning we make it our intention to spend the day like God would?

As Advent begins it is a good time to reset our intentions, to re-find ourselves in the story. I am going to lead a series of Advent reflections for us to think together about how we want to use all God's property given to us here – our buildings, our worship, our friendships, our service, and the further abundant gifts we might discover together – how in the words of the parable we go out "at once and trade with them" in the year to come. I hope you will find a time that enables you to come to at least one of those to share in creating a sense of purpose for the year in this household of faith.

Let's commit ourselves to giving thanks for the abundance of God's generosity, and to responding to the urgency Jesus shows us for sharing this in the world.

Gracious God, help us to know that you share everything with us in trust and expectation, help us to honour you in the way we use your gifts, so the world may know your infinite love. Amen

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