

Pentecost 24 Matthew 25.14-30

15<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

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“John of the Cross wrote that ‘in the evening of life we will be judged on love alone’. The two servants in this parable probably more experienced in loving, fearlessly invest their portions of love. Heedless of sheer foolhardiness, they risk ego, rejection, derision, even death, adventurously increasing the master’s wealth of love in the world. The last servant missed the point...the poor clueless man finds himself in the outer darkness for clinging to the supposed safety of burying his love in the ground” [Episcopal Priest, Suzanne Guthrie <http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/proper28a.html> ]

This is the way that Suzanne Guthrie, an American Episcopal priest summarise the main point of this parable. I think this is the right. I think we are supposed to take the ‘talent’ (which is, in the ancient world, a large quantity of money) to represent a huge gift to us of grace...of God’s love...of God’s investment of us. And that as we give these gifts of God away to others, that the investment of God in us expands. And so God does in fact reap where God did not initially sow.

There may be a connection between this parable and John’s gospel where Jesus says to his disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). The earthly Jesus of Nazareth had a ministry that lasted between 1 and 3 years, BUT through the Spirit of Christ, God’s grace is unleashed in an unlimited way – in every human being – growing exponentially.

This parable also points us back to the parable of the sower in Matthew Chapter 13. In that parable Jesus talks about seed falling on different kinds of ground. When the seed falls on good soil, it bears fruit, in one case a hundred fold, in another sixty and in another thirty. Jesus goes on in that parable to explain to his disciples what is meant by “good soil”. Good soil is where someone hears the word (Logos) and understands it. The “Word” is not a written text – the Word is Christ himself. If you understand Christ – meaning you comprehend his unlimited graciousness and love for you, then that love will expand exponentially to others.

This points us to what lies at the heart of the last servant’s reluctance to put the master’s gifts to work. This last servant withholds himself because of fear of God: “Master, I knew that were a harsh man.....so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground”.

This servant’s capacity to love is undermined by his image of God a ‘harsh man’. What we have here is a variation on the same theme as the parable of the sower in Chapter 13. Because he has not comprehended the love of God in Christ (that is the Word – the LOGOS), the seed sown cannot reproduce.

Last week I suggested that the “foolishness” of five bridesmaids lay in the fact that they did not trust the comprehensive generosity of the Groom and so they went to the shops in search of oil when what the needed to be doing was staying put and trusting in the groom’s generosity. The ‘good oil’ of trust is not something that can be bought at a shop.

The good oil is the gift of Christ himself. Christ comes to remake our image of God, and this is so important because we become what we look at (Psalm 135:18). This is why the New Testament, time and time again is pointing out that 'Jesus is the Image of the invisible God'.

John 1:1-14 'In the beginning was the word. The word was with God and the word was God'

John 14:9 'Who ever has seen me has seen the Father'

Colossians 1:15 'Christ is the image of the invisible God'

2 Corinthians 4:5 'the glory of Christ who is the image of God'

Philippians 2:5-11 'Jesus was in the form of God'

Hebrews 1:3 '[Christ] is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God very being'.

We really can't get any clearer than this. We are loved by a Christlike God and once we know that we don't need to be afraid of God. We won't see God as a 'harsh man'.

The parable is not meant to be turned into just another way of hammering this third servant for his apparent failure. We completely misuse this parable if we turn it into a morality tale along the lines of 'believe in Jesus or God will turf you into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The third servant is to be pitied – he invites us to compassion because he is like us whenever we become afraid and self isolated. He finds himself in the outer darkness because there is a part of this soul where the "light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6) has not penetrated. He is yet to comprehend the depth of the love of God. His heart is still conditioned by a world of fear where harsh masters really do throw people into outer darkness for their sins. He is a bit like Saul of Tartus, bitter and twisted, weeping and gnashing his teeth and hating the world until Christ finally breaks through to him. He deserves our compassion...our reaching out to him.

And of course, God is infinitely more loving than we are. If we can reach out to this man with our compassion, then shall not God also so and for all eternity....just as he goes in search of the lost sheep?

Eventually this servant too will come face to face with Christ and will no longer say, "I knew you were a harsh man". He will now say, "Thankyou Lord, I now know that you love me". Let us pray that this happens today for all whose lives are constrained by fear and let us pray for ourselves that we ourselves may give our lives away in the same way that God has given his life for us.

