

An Address by Ash Leighton Plom, 15 November 2020

Multiplication. Are you any good at it? During the first lockdown, when we were 'home tutoring' Alfred with worksheets sent to us by St David's Primary, I was put to shame by how slow I am at multiplication, and stunned by how quick he is.

The Gospel reading we've just heard is all about multiplication, and the reading from Thessalonians gives us some specifics on the skills we need.

The Gospel reading ends Jesus' discourse in Matthew on the Second Coming and the End of the World. It serves as his farewell sermon - meant as both a comfort, and a warning to us, and what a great need we have of both!

The reading from 1 Thessalonians was similar. Paul has just written in the last chapters about the resurrection, and then the Second Coming. So Paul exhorts us to Christian duties: faith, hope, love, exhorting us to be well-armoured with faith and love, and to wear salvation like a helmet. So we must encourage one another, with the comfort we have from the Lord – the assurance of salvation. It is easier to comfort others, even in lockdown 2.0, when we fix our minds on the comfort we have received from God.

The simple meaning of the gospel parable is to live and serve with diligence as we get ready for Jesus' return, making the best use of the resources he has given us.

In the parable, the Master is Christ, who ultimately owns all things, as he's the creator of all things.

However, in characteristic generosity, he doesn't horde his property, but lets us steward it, and so the servants are humans, entrusted with the care of his creation. This is a reminder, then, that everything we have comes from Christ. We are tenants on his land, and stewards of his gifts.

In the parable, the Master is going on a journey, which may be symbolic of his ascension. I think this means that the servants entrusted with their Master's property are *Christians* particularly - we the Church are his household, we are employed by him in his ministry to the rest of creation, and we are given his Spirit when he ascends into heaven.

So we have everything we need, even in lockdown - Scripture, the Spirit, friendship with one another – and not just for our own benefit, but specifically *so that we will multiply*, by sharing the faith with others. We are stewards of grace, and we are tasked to make a profit with it.

Perhaps here I should note that the value of even a single talent, just one of the coins we see Christ entrust to his people in the parable, was about the same weight as a person! A single talent was worth about 16 and a half years of labour! So don't let anyone suggest to you that the dude who only got one talent was hard done by!

In a way, this signifies God giving you *you*, even if nothing else(!): you are worth your own weight in gold. You yourself are a valuable gift from God, to yourself, and to those around you.

So, two of the servants make good use of the resources they receive - they invest them and multiply the wealth. It says they were active about this, they went and invested, traded, and so harvested the returns.

We need to be at work, as Christians, in our own lives, loving and serving, in the name of Jesus, to reap a harvest for him.

Lockdown 2.0 may offer us more, not fewer, opportunities to love and serve. Ask for help when you need it, offer it where you can. Encourage one another - I am impressed and proud of this congregation's generosity responding to local and global needs.

What of the other servant, then? I notice his attempt to justify his inactivity: he says "I didn't lose anything you gave me - here it is, all of it... I didn't squander any of it on sin, I never opposed any good cause, I never misused my power or hurt anyone."

But the Master doesn't want you to break even, he wants multiplication!

The parable says this servant was given just one talent, and buried it, but I fear the Church (globally, not just us here, and throughout history) has too many servants who have been given 5 talents or more of skills and gifts and haven't used them profitably for God's Kingdom! Don't be like that when you meet your Master! He won't be impressed.

Finally, notice the third servant's posture, his attitude. The first two servants were thankful and acknowledged to the Master "You gave me" five talents or two talents. But this last guy has a bad attitude, and blames God. "You're a hard man", he says. But the opposite is true! God generously blessed him with a share of his creation! And Jesus generously gave it all - I mean, his life - to give us eternal life. He's not a hard Master, but a generous one. Often people blame God for their own sinfulness, and if that's you, I encourage you: end that today.

Instead, let's be like the good servants, who take stock of what they have received, and invest it well in Kingdom causes. Then the Master will commend you, as he commends these two in the parable, "Well done, my good and faithful servant".

One way you might invest in multiplication is by sharing our services with others. You could forward the links to a friend, or share them on social media. Pray. Love. Hope. And I'd like to personally invite you to try our Advent Experience, called Thrive, which we'll be linking you to in our notices and online.

Put on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that we may live with him in glory.