

Our song to sing or to read: God Gives Us A Future

God gives us a future, daring us to go
into dreams and dangers on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow in the Spirit's power
we will let God change us for new life starts now.

We must leave behind us sins of yesterday
For God's new beginning is a better way
Fear and doubt and habit must not hold us back
God gives hope, and insight, and the strength we lack.

Holy Spirit, teach us how to read the signs
How to meet the challenge of our troubled times.
Love us into action, stir us into prayer
Till we choose God's life, and find our future there.

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A Prayer

Lord, we give you thanks for all your gifts to us: for daily food; for your church; for family and friends; for the freedom to choose to use or not to use opportunities to serve you and to grow. We thank you for the gifts and abilities we have; for your Word; for the power of your love shown in Jesus our Lord.

O God, help us to respond to the trust that you have shown in calling us to follow Jesus. May we be worthy of that trust. May we be people who are unafraid to live fully and as richly as you want us to live.
Amen

With thanks to Brian Turrell for preparing today's reflection



A Gathering – Psalm 100

Sing to the Lord, all the world!
Worship the Lord with joy!
Come before him with happy songs!
Acknowledge that the Lord is God.
He made us and we belong to him
we are his people
we are his flock.
Amen



Preparation

Let us pray that we may respond to God's trust in us.
God, our gracious and loving Father
you no longer call us servants but friends.
There is so much you have entrusted to us
even the future of your kingdom of justice and love.
Give us the grace to show mercy and goodness in this world
to bring reconciliation and joy to everyone.
Help us to follow your example of care and compassion for all.
To use whatever gifts we have to serve you
to grasp every opportunity to help others
and show them by our love - the God who loves them.
In the name of Jesus, our Lord who taught us to pray:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us in the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.
Now and forever. Amen



First Reading: Matthew 25:14–30

Reflection

Our reading is the *Parable of the Three Servants* or sometimes known as *The Parable of the Talents*. This parable tells of the master going away and leaving the three servants with the task of putting the talents he gave them to good use. Servants one and two followed the master's instructions, but the third servant did not. What is disturbing about this parable is how it ended with the third servant. He buried his talent rather than risk losing it being called "useless" and "thrown out in the darkness, where he will cry and grind his teeth". That seems unfair and cruel. My reaction was - what message can I find in this parable? Why did Jesus tell his disciples this parable? And I also asked – why did I volunteer to prepare a message for Church in the Bag for 15 November before I knew what the lectionary Gospel reading was? Perhaps it was a case of "Fools tread where wise men do not go"!

This parable comes after a series beginning with the heading 'No one knows the day or the hour' and the parables of the 'Faithful and Unfaithful Servant', and of the 'Ten Girls'. To conclude this section in Matthew's Gospel is the passage 'The Final Judgement' with its challenging message about the purpose of Jesus' existence and about the meaning of Christian life.

In previous chapters Matthew records Jesus seeking to prepare his disciples on three occasions for his death. Thus, the parable can be read as a message that the disciples were to be faithful in the time of waiting between Jesus' death and his return. In Matthew's Gospel, faithfulness called for the disciples to emulate the example of the life of Jesus. Early in his mission, Jesus had pronounced the Kingdom of God is here, where the hungry are fed, the lame are healed and the meek are blessed. Thus, faithfulness is the message to continue living the life of Jesus in his absence – to care, to show compassion for others.

Rev Dr William Loader in his commentary on this parable places an emphasis on talents for what they were – a very large amount of money. And money is powerful. The parable, he writes, challenges us



not to sit on the life of God and not sit back in complacency. The parable could be understood to making the point that we should allow the life of God to flow through us because it is powerful – like money. Dr Loader argues that: "If the modern use of talents has any relation to the text, it is at the level of allowing God's life to do its adventure with us and putting our talents/abilities at God's disposal. The talents of the parable are really about God's life and power, not about our natural abilities. The appropriate response is to allow God's investing hand to employ our abilities".

Another commentary viewed talents as opportunities that present themselves to serve and help others; to put into practice the example and teachings of Jesus. When opportunities arise, they are moments of decision. We can choose to put aside our own interests and help others or we can turn away and look after ourselves. The first and second servants took the opportunity to do as their master wanted and use their talents. The third servant did not do as expected of him. In burying his talent, he did not grow. He did not discover what he was capable of – nor did he gain any new talent.

A final message comes from considering the third servant's view of his master: "I know you are a hard man ... I was afraid". Perhaps the picture the third servant had of his master reflects the belief held by Jews that God was a severe judge who treated his people according to how well they had kept the Law, which produced fear and prevented them from growing. It especially prevented them from receiving and accepting the new experience that God in Jesus was communicating. The third servant turned his back on the opportunity to risk using his one talent/, just as the religious leaders had turned their backs on Jesus and the opportunity to grow. To experience a new life - a life of compassion, a new experience of God.

Whatever message this parable brings to each of us, it says: risk leaving the security and comfort of our life; be faithful, practise and live the teachings of Jesus; trust his promise: "Lo, I am with you always"; and use every opportunity, every gift, the power of God offered to us in Jesus to experience life in all its fullness.