

Haverhill Methodist Church 15th November 2020

Worship at Home - Sarah Glasswell

The parable of the talents, or, 'nothing ventured, nothing gained and a whole lot to lose.'

Thank you for joining in our worship today from home. I hope you are keeping well, I look forward to the time when we can all be together again in unrestricted fellowship and worship. But for now we play our important part in keeping ourselves and others safe, joined together in spirit, a bond that cannot be broken by distance nor pandemic.

This week we are looking at the parable of the talents, and the sermon is based on an article by Joel Ryan, from the Christianity.com website, with my own thoughts added in.

Call to worship

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
throughout all generations.

Before the mountains were born

or you brought forth the whole world,

from everlasting to everlasting you are God. Psalm 90, vs 1-2

We pray...Father God we turn our hearts and minds to you now, seeking out your presence, even as we know you are always with us. We remember that our true home is in you. We praise you in awe and wonder that the creator of all we know, and so much more, welcomes each one of us as his precious children.

We are not worthy of your love for we have sinned, turned away from your will when it has suited us. At times we have buried the treasure you give us to look after and use for your glory. We are truly sorry Lord God for our wrongdoings and ask once again for your forgiveness. It is astounding that each time we ask, you always forgive, and you do so with love and open arms to welcome us back home to you.

We thank you for your unending patience with us and forgiveness for us, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Lord, master, friend and brother. Amen

Song

Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice;
you became nothing, poured out to death.
Many times I've wondered at your gift of life,
and I'm in that place once again,
I'm in that place once again.

*And once again I look upon the cross where you died.
I'm humbled by your mercy and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.*

Now you are exalted to the highest place,
King of the heavens, where one day I'll bow.
But for now I marvel at this saving grace,
and I'm full of praise once again,
I'm full of praise once again.

*And once again I look upon the cross where you died.
I'm humbled by your mercy and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank you,
once again I pour out my life.*

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Song

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed;

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die - I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home- what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

Stuart K. Hine (c) 1949 and 1953 Stuart Hine Trust CIO Stuart K. Hine Trust (Admin. by Integrity Music)

Reading

Matthew 25, vs 14-30 The Parable of the talents

Those watching this service on their computers will now see a short video, an illustration by Pastor Francis Chan who was speaking at a Christian youth conference. He had a gymnastics balance beam on the stage and stood on it. He spoke about how sometimes life can get a bit wobbly, can feel unsafe or scary. He then said sometimes people decide to live a safe life, taking no risks. They want to just go to church on Sundays and maybe serve in the crèche. He laid down on the beam with his arms and legs wrapped around it to demonstrate trying to just get through life safely. He said some people's best prayer is that they will die in their sleep and not feel a thing. He then said that when they get to heaven they will unhook themselves from the beam and finish with the typical gymnast's ending after a dismount (putting their arms up in the air to show they have finished). Francis demonstrated this which made

everyone laugh. He then asked the young people to imagine a gymnast doing that, how would the judges score them?

And what happens when we stand before The Judge? Do we expect Him to say “well done, good job, you didn’t slip or fall.” That’s not the life God has called us to, although it is how many will choose to live.

Song

Come, Let Us Anew
Our Journey Pursue,
Roll Round With The Year,
And Never Stand Still Till The Master Appear.

His Adorable Will
Let Us Gladly Fulfil,
And Our Talents Improve,
By The Patience Of Hope, And The Labour Of Love.

Our Life Is A Dream;
Our Time As A Stream
Glides Swiftly Away,
And The Fugitive Moment Refuses To Stay.

The Arrow Is Flown,
The Moment Is Gone;
The Millennial Year
Rushes On To Our View, And Eternity’s Here.

O That Each In The Day
Of His Coming May Say,
“I Have Fought My Way Through,
I Have Finished The Work Thou Didst Give Me To Do!”

O That Each From His Lord
May Receive The Glad Word,
“Well And Faithfully Done!
Enter Into My Joy, And Sit Down On My Throne.”

Charles Wesley - Public Domain

Sermon

I love that Jesus taught so often using parables, stories that illustrated something about the nature of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, and the nature of people too. When we read or hear a good story we conjure up

images to go with it, we make our own little film in our minds, and that makes it come alive, we make it relatable to ourselves and it's more easily remembered.

In the parable of the talents we find a master entrusting three of his servants with his wealth, while he goes away. A talent was a measurement of weight for gold or silver, so he is asking them to look after his money essentially. The master promises to come back, so they know he will be asking for it back and want to know what they did with it.

The first and second servants both took on the responsibility and immediately set to work, investing the money wisely so there would be an increase waiting when the master returned.

The third one however decided to simply bury it, which would keep it safe with no effort. The master would get back his one talent and no more.

What does the parable of the talents mean?

The master of this parable represents Jesus. The servants are Christ-followers. Similar to the parable, Jesus has also given responsibility to his followers, and similar to the parable, he, like the master, has promised to one day return.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3). This is the reward for wisely using what Jesus gives us, and seeing an increase. Just because Jesus is physically absent from the earth, doesn't mean we are meant to sit back and do nothing.

Jesus has entrusted us with his mission while he is physically away:

- Spreading the gospel (Matthew 28:16-20)
- Forgiving those who have wronged us (Matthew 6:14-15)
- Loving others (John 13:34-35)
- Caring for his church (John 21:17)
- Being an example to the world (Matthew 14:13-16)
- Feeding the hungry and thirsty (Matthew 25:25)
- Caring for the poor, the prisoner, and the sick (Matthew 25:36)
- Being hospitable to foreigners and outsiders (Matthew 25:35).

Jesus has made Christians participants in his ministry. We are also stewards of the things Christ values most.

Jesus has entrusted us with his greatest treasures, making us caretakers of his ministry and commissioned ambassadors of his mission. This is an incredible responsibility; one we should take seriously.

A good steward will find ways to grow and improve it what has been entrusted to them, rather than just protect what there is.

For Christians, this can apply to our time, our money, our body, and our abilities and skills. When we see these things as a borrowed investment belonging to God and needing to be returned, we will be motivated to treat them with care and intention.

In the parable, the wise servants knew that their master would return and were motivated to grow his investment with the time and money they were given. Big or small, they made it count and were eager to hand back all they had earned.

So what about the third servant? His response was quite different. He did the bare minimum, buried the talent he was given, nothing more than that. He knew he still had a responsibility to take care of it, but something stopped him from putting it to good use. He said it was fear of his master, seeing him as a cruel taskmaster, not a generous, gracious lord.

He didn't take joy in the promise of the master's return but instead wasted his time, his opportunities, and the master's money. He saw no growth and no return as a result.

The master viewed him as lazy and wicked, not even taking the simple action of looking for a little return by placing the talent in the bank for some interest. I think the servant buried his head in the sand along with the talent.

When we think about the responsibility Jesus has chosen to give each of us in his physical absence it can feel very overwhelming. Fear can be paralyzing. What if we get it wrong, make a mistake, do more harm than good? Some people do expect God to be harsh and would take no pleasure in serving him. I don't think they have an accurate picture of God.

Jesus takes a real risk by asking us to take on his mission. There is no guarantee that we will do it well, let alone perfectly. It is likely that we will make mistakes.

God knows all of that. And he still asks us to do it. That's amazing! His choice to do that is born out of his love for us and desire for relationship

with us. He gives us space for mistakes, and growth, for learning, for the joy of working alongside him to spread the good news. It's for our benefit, and we decide if we take up the challenge, the responsibility.

There are very real consequences to our response, as there was in the parable.

Scripture promises that Jesus will one day return, and when he does, he will ask us, his servants, to give a report of how we spent the time and opportunities he gave us.

Imagine Jesus asking you these questions...

- Did you care for those you were instructed to protect?
- Did you provide for those in need?
- Did you share the good news of my salvation and forgiveness with others?
- Did you further the kingdom of heaven in your family and community?
- Were you a faithful steward of all I entrusted you with?

Those who are faithful with what they're entrusted will be trusted with more, and Jesus said that they are the ones who will "enter into their master's joy" and share in the glory of his presence.

Those who are not faithful in this may face the harsh reality of being called a wicked and lazy servant. Worst of all, they may not share in the joy of their master's presence when he returns. That is something we really don't want to miss out on.

That in itself is quite an overwhelming thought. But let's look back to the beginning of the parable for some reassurance.

Here's the beauty in the story. Like the master, Jesus know us, his servants well, and our capabilities. He gives to us, individually, 'according to our ability'. He doesn't ask us to do what he knows we are not able to. Some are given greater responsibilities than others, based on what is possible for them at the time. When we can take on more, he gives us more.

The master knew the third servant could only manage one talent, the smallest amount. He knew the return would be small, but he still gave. Not very savvy business wise, but this is God's kingdom where we are all included and given the chance to play a part. That means, proportionally, we are all given the same opportunity. I get the same chance as Billy

Graham did! I'll never live up to that, and thankfully God doesn't expect me to. But just like Billy, I start small, make an increase and then am given a bit more, work with that, and then a bit more and so on. It's the same for every single one of us.

We have an advantage over the parable servants. Their master left them to it. We have Jesus right beside us, going ahead and behind us. He prepares the way for us to do his will, and he follows behind, able to mop up any mistakes. He forgives and gives second chances. In fact, we never run out of chances with Jesus. He takes great joy in doing the mission with us, and we should too.

It isn't always easy, it does involve risks, but it is worth it. Think back to that balance beam. Are you going to walk it, or cling on for dear life and risk losing it?

Song

All I once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this

*Knowing you, Jesus
Knowing you, there is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more
To be found in you and known as yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn
All-surpassing gift of righteousness

*Knowing you, Jesus
Knowing you, there is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord*

Oh, to know the power of your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like you in your death, my Lord
So with you to live and never die

*Knowing you, Jesus
Knowing you, there is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love you, Lord*

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Prayers of intercession and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray for the peace of the world, for statesmen and rulers, that they may have courage to know and wisdom to do what is right. We think especially at this time of the election in America. We ask that there will be peace on the streets, clarity and justice in the results and a positive way to move forward for all.

We pray for all those who work to improve international relationships, that they may find the true way to reconcile people of different race, colour and creed. We pray for all people, the world over, that they may have justice and freedom, and live in security and peace.

We remember our brothers and sisters who face persecution because they follow you Jesus. Be close to them and protect them we pray. Strengthen them and be their refuge and strength. We pray for the work of Open Doors to support them around the world, giving encouragement and practical help.

We bring to you again the coronavirus pandemic. We are thankful for the keyworkers who are keeping our country going through this difficult time. We ask for wisdom for our leaders, especially our Prime Minister and the cabinet as they seek a balance between safety and people's livelihoods. We thank you for the welcome news of an imminent vaccine and pray that it will be successful. As we live differently at the moment we ask that you will be with us, comfort us and teach us lessons that we might not learn in more usual circumstances.

We remember that there are people who are more isolated than ever, or whose anxiety is at an all time high. Open our eyes to see them, be good friends and to demonstrate your all-encompassing love.

Lord we know there are many within our own congregation and circle of family and friends who desperately need your healing, in mind, body or spirit. Jesus, will you reach out to them, delay no longer, and bring their healing and recovery, release them from pain, illness and worry. We ask these things in the power of your name Jesus.

Lord, when we look at the news we can see fear, anger, hatred, poverty and injustice. Embolden us to step out in faith, to use the talents you have given us, to make a difference according to our ability. This is the calling you have placed on our lives. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Song

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord for the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care:
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world where men disown and doubt you,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without you:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us-
self on the cross, and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Timothy Dudley-Smith © 1976 (Admin. by Oxford University Press)

Blessing

As we end our time together we remain united in the body of Christ, within our own congregation as well as with fellow brothers and sisters around the world.

May God the Father bless you with talents according to your ability so that you may serve him and increase his kingdom here on earth, and so that you may live your life in all fullness, faith and joy. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord this day and forevermore. Amen