

Year A Proper 33

Judges 4: 1-7

1 Thess 5:1-11

Matthew 25: 14-30

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. **Amen.**

Abba (Money money money) or the Beatles (All You Need Is Love)?

All three readings are so rich and inspiring that if we had 45 minutes I would cover them all, but I am sure you are relieved to hear that I will focus on just one of them today – the gospel reading.

The first thing to say about this is, can we forget the title this passage is normally given of 'The Parable of the Talents'? It is completely the wrong title and deflects our attention and focus away from the whole meaning of the parable. This parable isn't advice on how to make wise financial investments.

Can I suggest a much better title? The parable of the fearful slave.

Let's briefly look at the text of the parable. All three slaves are trusted with a considerable amount of money; in fact a vast fortune. The third slave was only given one talent; a fifth of the amount given to the first slave and only half of what was given to the second slave. However, one talent equated to 15 years' wages for a slave, so relatively, it was a considerable sum.

We know the third slave's opinion of his master; for he said, in verses 24 and 25, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed: so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground.'

But this is a very different perception of the master compared to the other two slaves, who clearly viewed their master with trust and with confidence.

The results of the different perceptions of the master are drastically different, and in this parable are clearly set out for us. The slaves who trusted in their master, who had confidence in and loved their Lord, were able to achieve such amazing things, despite being slaves, at almost the lowest rung in the social hierarchy in that society. And because of the trust and high regard they had for their Lord and master they felt free to take a risk – a risk that for one was with 75 times their yearly income and for the other with 30 times their yearly income.

And with that risk-taking, or shall we call it, with faith, they were able to achieve an astounding amount. In fact their acts of faith returned to them double what they invested. And they got to share in those riches with the master.

Let's compare the different outlooks and outcomes of the first two slaves from the third, and how that may inform our understanding of God.

The third slave feared the master, and that dominant emotion drove all that slave's thinking and actions. And do you see that his fears lead to his fears being realised? A self-fulfilling prophecy indeed.

The first two slaves however are assured that the master cares for them, and they have no hesitation in acting from a psychological

position of love and security. They act in ways that may seem quite risky, but they abide in the love of the master and are acting in ways they believe will show their trust in and for the master. Their dominant emotion also drives their thinking and actions, but in a much more creative and profitable way.

I wonder if when we consider the power and majesty of God, do we get nervous, do we start feeling fearful? If so, then this parable is for us. Let us remember that often when the Bible talks about being in awe of God, awe does not mean fear, even if I am sorry to say, some translators chose to use the word 'fear'.

This parable is pointing us to think and behave like the first two slaves; their relationship with the master was full of love and trust. They felt confident enough in their relationship to take some risky steps, living in full knowledge of their master's love. They may have felt some trepidation, but they were able to focus on living in God's love and acting from that place. They were not afraid to make an occasional mistake, and to take risks in investing in their master's project. This parable shows us that the slaves shared in their master's riches – does that not point us to an eternal truth about our relationship with God. When we abide in love with God, God abides in us and our lives are enriched, and I definitely do not mean financially. This is no prosperity gospel being preached!

Do we make the excuse that we are not perfect, and cannot possibly deserve God's love, so don't want to put it to the test? God knows only too well that not one of us is perfect, and yet we are loved by God. Every person you meet is loved by God, including the person who stares back at you in the mirror.

At the beginning of our service we say, 'God is love and we are God's children. There is no room for fear in love. We love because God loved us first.'

When we know we are loved unconditionally, when we operate from that secure place, we can do amazing things. And what is our personal relationship like with a God of love, rather than with a scary angry and vengeful God? What is our personal relationship like with God when we know God looks on us with a loving gaze? I believe it enables us to grow, to explore, to take risks, to learn and rest in the welcome arms of God and enter into God's presence with joy and wondrous awe.

This parable clearly points us away from feeling fear and acting from an insecure place. This parable clearly points us towards building a relationship with God based on love and trust, knowing that when we act from a place of love with all good intentions in our hearts, we are part of God's mission.

Each of us has aspects of our faith that we are willing to share with others. I wonder where the boundary is for you, where you start to feel uncomfortable and think you are taking a risk – a risk that may be personal to you – and don't take any steps? A point at which you doubt yourself, and rather than sharing God's 'property' – the love of God and the good news of Jesus - you decide to hide it away and not invest it in building relationships, or in inviting someone to join us at a service on-line or at Bible study or faith development group?

In God's love, what may you be willing to do on your journey in faith? Where might you, a unique child of God, invest the talents given to you? In these times of anxiety and fear for so many, what might you be able to safely do – COVID regulations permitting – that invests those talents, to further God's kingdom on earth?

Less Abba, more Beatles. Or maybe some Elvis Costello, 'Love, Peace and Understanding'?