

Pentecost 22 – “God’s Generosity” – 13th November 2011

Reading: Matthew 25: 14 – 30 ‘The Parable of the Talents’

Introduction

Traditionally, sermons on this parable exhort us as followers of Christ to discover and use our gifts and abilities shrewdly and generously, to the glory of God. There is nothing wrong with this proclamation; God should be glorified with every aspect of our being. However, digging deeper into this treasure chest unearths even greater riches. So let us journey through this parable.

God’s Generosity

The kingdom of heaven begins with an act of incredible divine generosity. Extra-ordinary wealth, power, freedom and responsibility is freely given to three slaves or servants. No real direction is given to the way to use these talents. They are simply, freely given. “Talent” was originally a monetary term, referring to a particular unit of gold or silver. Historians of language believe that the modern understanding of a talent as a gift or ability has derived directly from this parable. In Jesus’ day, however, a talent was a unit of money approximating fifteen years of earnings by a day labourer.

In today’s terms, a basic labourer’s position may earn \$45,000 a year which multiplied by 15 is \$675,000 (this figure of course may vary based on interpretation). However, it was a huge amount of money beyond your wildest dreams, especially if you again multiplied it by 5!

The master then goes away, thus providing the distance and room needed for others to lead, grow, take chances and flourish. Here the exceptional love of God is not only shown by generosity in entrusting full talents; it is also demonstrated by God’s willingness to self-limit so that we may exist and live creatively, in the image of God. God offers gifts and space so that we may be beings who have a hand in shaping lives, futures, and even fortunes. God demonstrates love, not always by doing for us, but by limiting self and letting us learn.

Settling of Accounts

The longest and most detailed part of the parable (verses 19-30) concerns the settling of accounts upon the master’s return. The opening words of verse 19; “After a long time ...” refers to the return of the Son of

Man. The delay of the Parousia, the second coming of Christ, has always been a deeply divisive aspect of Christianity. In this parable Jesus uses phraseology that gives us no idea of when this is likely. However what will happen is that like the servants we will be judged on how we have been faithful to what we have been given. The industrious slaves are positive examples of how Christians are to conduct themselves in the present. When the master calls them to give account of their activity, they do so with confidence. They have acted with fidelity and responsibility, producing the works of love and mercy. The master responds with "Well done, good and trustworthy or faithful servant." They are then invited to "Come and share your master's happiness". (vss 21c & 23c) Literally this means entering into the joy of the messianic banquet and picks up the imagery from the previous parable. Both slaves receive the same reward.

No such case for the third slave. Here is the warning of the parable for those who do nothing with their God given gifts. The third slave had a completely different attitude to the first two, speaks against the master and doesn't try to invest the talent given in any way. The outcome may seem harsh but no effort has been used by this third slave. The talent is taken from the third slave and he is cast into 'the outer darkness' which resonates with the fate of the five foolish maidens in the previous parable. All are barred from the banqueting feast of the master or king.

Conclusion

What we think about God and then do in response to the master's gracious trust is neither trivial nor incidental. We have real choices and power with genuine consequences resulting from the ways we use our freedom. What we do or fail to do shapes this world and our lives. It is not the only factor but it is nonetheless crucial.

We are called to live out our faith in all stages of life so that when we are called to account our master will say, "Well done good and faithful servant." Amen.