

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> November – Pentecost 23 – 9am Wesley

Theme: “Build each other up”

Readings: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Matthew 25:14-30 ‘The parable of the talents’

### Introduction

Today I want us to do our reflection in two parts using our readings as reflection points. I’ll give some background and thoughts on each reading and then I’m going to invite you to reflect on a couple of questions that pick up an aspect from the given reading. Hence you might like to think about the readings with me.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

We need to understand that Thessalonica was a bustling seaport, a centre for trade and the largest city in Macedonia. Paul knew of its importance and that if a small Christian community could be established there then Christianity could spread on the trade routes. Certainly Paul, Silas and Timothy established a small faith community in Thessalonica but their stay was short-lived. Their initial time in Thessalonica is recorded in Acts 17. I share a few verses with you but you can read more:

*“..they came to Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue. As his custom was, Paul went to the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead.....Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the market place, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. .... As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea....”*

Not an auspicious start for this little Christian community. However, it is to this group that Paul writes this pastoral and spiritual letter encouraging them in their faith and correcting some mis-understandings from their theology.

Here towards the end of the first letter to the Thessalonians Paul says:

- Don’t worry about the date of ‘the coming of the Lord’, rather be prepared for it
- Live as people of the light, those ready for their Lord
- Put on faith and love as a breastplate (it protects you)
- Put on the hope of salvation as a helmet (again a protection)
- Be an encouragement to one another and build each other up (in your faith is implied)

What a great way to be pastoral and spiritual to those struggling with their faith in a largely hostile environment. Paul obviously knew what this environment was like. He had experienced it so he was able to speak to this faith community and be an encourager to them in their faith.

1. Who have been the encouragers to us in our faith?
2. What have they said or done to encourage us?
3. What can we learn from them as we share with others?

Let us take a few minutes to share on these questions. For those who wish we may also share back as a community.

### Matthew 25:14-30 'The Parable of the Talents'

Here we have another one of those tricky parables involving money (talent) and the way we use it. This is a familiar story of a rich man preparing to go on a long journey. He gives to three servants three gifts of money from his property. The three gifts vary in amounts according to the individual's ability. He then leaves them and goes off. When he comes back he checks on the three. The first two have done well, used the talents using their abilities and made a fine profit. The third has simply hoarded the master's money and returns the original gift. The master goes ballistic and casts the one talent (now NO talent) individual into the outside darkness. This seems incredibly harsh in one sense, but in another way it is a huge warning to us not to waste what we have been given by not using it.

In our last Bible study from the series "Christianity in 21<sup>st</sup> Century" by Avril Hannah-Jones in the study titled 'Living as Christian radicals' it asked the question: "Are we willing and able to be a church of martyrs?" That seemed a strange question until Avril spelt out that 'martyrs' literally means, 'witness' in the Greek. Usually we understand martyrs as being killed for their cause. In our Australian society and as we live our Christian faith, it doesn't seem so drastic. However, we are called to live out our faith and sometimes that may lead to some drastic consequences. This week a group met and prayed in Zed Seselja's office protesting about the 800 children held in detention. Uninvited they stayed all day and prayed for asylum seeker families, federal MP's and Senators. Eventually they were ejected, having been arrested for their 'pray-in come sit-in'. One of them was Daniel Cotton, a Uniting Church young man, who believes that his faith leads him into social action.

In the Bible study there was the quote from Pastor Martin Niemoller, a German pastor in the time of Hitler's regime who wrote after the war the following:

"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out – because I wasn't a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out – because I wasn't a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me."

At what point do you think our faith leads us into civil dis-obedience?

Where is our passion and how are we using our talents for the Kingdom of God?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, you have called us to be your disciples and entrusted to us your kingdom. Knowing our limitations and ourselves, we are amazed that you have put such great trust in us and our abilities to be faithful to you. Make us more faithful. Make us take the risks in your name and be martyrs (witnesses) to bring glory to you. Renew in each of us the conviction that we are your representatives, your ambassadors in the world. Enable us so to live our lives that others might look at us and see your kingdom taking form through our lives. Amen.