

Sermon 15/11/20

Preached by: The Venerable Dr Jane Mainwaring, Archdeacon of St Albans

It's good to be with you this morning - I'm just sorry that it can't be in person and that we're back to sharing worship together via our screens and the wonders of the Internet and zoom.

As a still, fairly new archdeacon, I'm often asked how I'm finding the role. I'm also frequently asked, what does an Archdeacon do?

Well, what I'm discovering is that what an Archdeacon does when they find themselves in the middle of a pandemic is that they read the legislation and the guidance, and then they read it again and again, in trying to help clergy, churchwardens, and parishes work out what they can and cannot do.

It is always a nice feeling, when a parish contacts me to ask whether something they're planning is permissible under the regulations, to be able to say yes. Conversely, it is always rather disappointing and disheartening when I have to say no.

With the current restrictions in place I seem to have been saying no, more often than yes.

It is obvious to us all that so much of what we have previously been able to do, what we previously had, has, for now, been taken away from us, in order to try and keep one another safe and well.

This has been an undoubtable challenge, and it is easy to focus on what has gone, or what we lament - it is easy to focus on what we don't have, what we can't do.

However, our gospel reading today challenges us, I believe, to look at life in a different way.

Jesus tells the story of a man who gives his slaves varying amounts of talents before going away. On his return he calls his slaves and asks them what they had done with the talents he had given them.

The first 2 slaves were able to show the man how they had used what he had given them to make it into more. The third slave gave the man back exactly what had been given to him having done nothing with it, except bury it in the ground.

The man was pleased with his first two slaves and praised them, giving them more to look after. His response to the slave who had done nothing with what he was given, was to take what was originally given away, leaving the slave with nothing.

The obvious challenge from this story, this parable, is to use wisely the things which God has given us - to use the things we're given.

And why does this challenge us to look at life in a different way at the moment? Well, I think at the moment it is very easy to fall into the trap that I did, when I started talking a few minutes ago, when I began by being sorrowful for what can't be at the moment - sorrowful that we can't be physically together.

To me, reading this parable in this time and place presents a challenge to look at things differently - to view the world not through the lens of what we don't have, what we can't do, but instead to view the world through the lens of what we do have, what we can do.

Put very simply it challenges me to see life from the viewpoint, the starting point, of what we **do** have rather than what we don't have.

What talent is God putting into our hands at the moment?

What is it that we do have?

And how are we using what we've been given?

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Rather than beginning my words with regret for what we don't have at the moment, this parable challenges me to take a different starting point - to begin my words with 'due to the wonderful gift of the Internet and zoom, it is lovely to be with you this morning.'

Now, what God has given each of us will be different - what he has placed into our hands will be different - but the challenge is the same - to take what we're given and to use it to make something more - to see what we do have, rather than what we don't, and to seek to build something, to create something even better.

This is a way of looking at life as God does - not denying the sorrowful parts of the life - not ignoring suffering or the harsh realities of life - but instead viewing them through the lens of hope - viewing them through a lens of thankfulness for what we do have. Every miracle Jesus did took seriously the need before him, but was a response born out of a position of hope, using what was gifted to him to grow into something more- to grow hope.

So the challenge I take from our gospel reading this morning , which I offer to you to ponder upon, is what has God given to me- what **do** I have in a time when it is so easy to focus on what we **don't** have.

And how can I use what I do have in order to grow something else, in order to grow someone else, in order to respond to life, and all that it is throwing at us, from a place of thankfulness and from a place of hope?

May God give us all eyes to see what he's given us, and the courage to live our lives with thankfulness and in hopefulness, that we may to continue to build his Kingdom on earth, being good stewards of all we have. Amen.