

Leavening Church

Thought for Sunday 15th November (Steve Langton)

Our gospel reading for today is the 'parable of the talents'. You can read the whole parable in [Matthew 25: 14-30](#), but here are the first few verses:

¹⁴ 'Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,[Ⓜ] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ 'After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

²¹ 'His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The rest of the reading is too lengthy to include here but, briefly, the servant given two bags who made two more is similarly commended, whereas the one who hid the gold in a hole is called wicked and lazy, and is thrown outside into the darkness.

Various interpretations of this parable have been suggested, but let's keep to the traditional one, which suggests that the master represents Jesus or God, and the servants are His followers. The bags of gold are traditionally interpreted not just as the material riches that we might be given in this life, but the other blessings that come from God, including our talents and abilities.

The message is that all our talents ultimately come from God and our responsibility is to use them, not solely for our own benefit, but to serve God and our fellow human beings. In doing so we remember the two great commandments of Jesus that we read a couple of weeks ago; love God and love our neighbours

The task the servants are given is clearly challenging to them but the first two rise to that challenge and make good use of the gold that has been entrusted to them. Both are praised and rewarded for their work; the wording is identical in both cases, suggesting that the reward is proportional to their effort, not the monetary value of their activities. Remember this when society heaps praise on the great and the good, who may have done good things but have often achieved these from abundant reserves of talent and money. In God's eyes the ordinary person, who has been given less, but nevertheless serves the church or the community in more humble ways, may be just as worthy of praise.

This aspect of the parable reminds me of the story of the widow's mite ([Mark 12: 41-44](#)); Jesus watches people giving at the Temple and says that the widow who contributed two copper coins gave more than all the rich people who splashed their cash with great show. God's value scheme is very different to the world's.