

Sunday 15th November 20

Welcome to worship with Tyndale Baptist Church, wherever you are, whoever you're with, we share this space with the great cloud of witnesses to faith in Jesus Christ. Though separate we are one body, called to witness to God's presence in the world, called to be a community of hope. And so we offer our love in words and music, prayer and stillness.

Music It is a thing most wonderful

Call to Worship

One thing I have asked of the Lord,
this is what I seek:

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life;
to behold the beauty of the Lord
and to seek Him in His temple.

Call: Who is it that you seek?

Response: We seek the Lord our God.

Call: Do you seek Him with all your heart?

Response: Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Call: Do you seek Him with all your soul?

Response: Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Call: Do you seek Him with all your mind?

Response: Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Call: Do you seek Him with all your strength?

Response: Amen. Christ, have mercy.

Hymn How can I keep from singing

Opening Prayer

Today we turn our thoughts again, for a moment, from the things of earth to the things of your Kingdom, living God, trusted Saviour, renewing Spirit. We need you this hour and every hour and your promised presence is like a balm to our wounded lives. So we bring you our worship in thankfulness for the richness of life, and in gratitude that you have made us your own. How can we keep from singing of the depth of your love?

How can we keep from singing of the forgiveness we receive that constantly offers us the opportunity to grow in grace.

How can we keep from singing about the joy of knowing that we are accepted just as we are? How can we keep from singing about your peace which surpasses all understanding or your faithfulness to us through every generation?

How can we keep from singing of your compassion and care which is for all people, and all your creation? How can we keep from singing of the hope you fill our hearts with when we see the works of your hands and hear the promises of your word.

Today we bring you our hurts and regrets, as well as our joys and accomplishments. And we place them in the circle of your care for us just as we ask you to hold us and be close to us now in these moments of worship. Draw from us the adoration you deserve and help us to celebrate your life within us, for we are your children. Thanks you for loving us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit and teach us more of your ways. O God our maker. Amen

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Song Touch the earth gently

Declaration of faith

To whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life,
and we have believed and have come to know
that You are the Holy One of God.

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ,
King of endless glory.

Hymn BPW133: There is no moment of my life

Tyndale Singers

Reading

[Zephaniah 1.7,12-18](#)

[Matthew 25.14-30](#)

Hymn Speak O Lord

Sermon God given Talents

Well, you wouldn't want to invite Zephaniah to a party! That's all I can say. His somewhat gloomy predictions of destruction and displeasure were supposedly spoken at a time in the reign of King Josiah who led the kingdom of Judah to religious and social reform, but 'no, no', Zephaniah declared, these spiritual changes would not last. The people of Judah would return to wickedness and rebellion against God.

The northern kingdom of Israel was already in captivity, and Babylon was gaining in power and prestige. God had determined that the Babylonians would be the instrument to punish the nation of Judah. And Zephaniah and his prophet contemporaries, Jeremiah and Habakkuk, were some of the prophets God used to pronounce this warning message.

The Prophets task was to call God's people to account, to turn them upside down where they had lost sight of God's ways and turned to human kings, failed to trust in God for their sustenance and failed to be the witness to God in the world that God had intended. That has always it seems been part of the purpose of God to have a visible presence that would remind people of his presence in the world. A visible sign of the maker of all. A visible sign of the faithfulness of God in loving the world into being and sustaining it.

The words act as a kind of invitation to be present to the world they live in. A call to pay attention to each day, each moment, and to open their eyes to now in readiness because the day was coming when there would be judgement on their fulfilment of God's purpose. The Day of the Lord was something to be feared. It includes devastation, dust and dung! As I said, you wouldn't want to invite Zephaniah to a party.

But part of the bible story is this accountability of God's people for ensuring that God is made visible in each generation. And the warnings against giving human Kings the authority and power and even worship that is God's alone. Especially for God's people to consider the pitfalls of placing their trust in human powers instead of trusting in God. God's people have often been prone to building other idols and losing their distinctive witness to the one true God. I guess that's why there are so many of the prophet's voices of doom included in the scripture story. They demonstrate our desire to turn to dependence on our senses, the things we can see and hear and smell and touch to evidence our Faith. Proof and certainty. These are the things human beings crave. Not faith. And the people of God are mostly very human it would seem. I don't think you need me to point out the present applications of this very visibly manifest this week around the world in so many ways from over the pond to right here in our streets.

Lest we seem too gloomy, alongside the parable, these words are also an invitation to think about the life of Christ, and to focus on faith, love and hope – the aspirations of the Kingdom of heaven. And it was these aspirations that underpin stories of the kingdom that Jesus told about in his parables. What is a parable supposed to be telling us? About the Kingdom of God. What is Jesus trying to say in the particular story about the Talents?

A story about people who were given something and asked to use it in readiness for a day when they would be held accountable.

Is this a story where Jesus is saying 'everyone must use their talents for God'? What if we can find a simple response which might be to say that we should give all we have to God, then set out to try and work out in practice what that means for our daily lives. Does it mean money, or our time or our energy, our creativity or what...? And what does it mean in these particular days? I don't know about you, but it would've been much easier if Jesus had just told us straight. Forget all the interesting stories, with their clever use of everyday experience, like buying and selling sparrows at the market, or the nomadic lifestyle of the desert shepherds leading their sheep, or even the practice for security reasons of burying your valuables in the ground. Plain ordinary losing stuff like coins, animals, or a son! Never mind using all of these pictures, just tell us what and how we need to live as followers of Jesus Christ, and we can get on and work out how to put it into practice. It would be so much simpler. Following Jesus in this world is hard enough so why not set it out in clear instructions what it is we need to know about the Kingdom of God. Oops, there I go desiring certainty.

On the other hand, perhaps the parables reflect, even in the use of what sometimes seems confusing images and strange, contradictory situations, that following Jesus in our lives is never easy, or simple. In fact, none of life is easy and simple. Perhaps the parables are a reflection of the reality of life. Life has changed and is changing all the time, growing ever more complex, with difficult questions facing us about things which once we took for granted. Questions like: Who should we vote for? What should we spend our money on? How much should we give away for others? What's mine and what's God's? What is our responsibility for the poor and the prisoner and the homeless and the refugee? What does it mean to love my neighbour when I don't really know them? Just who is my neighbour?

The parables Jesus told are to equip us for these questions. Not easy instructions for every situation, but stories which require us to work hard to know what actions to take. The parable of the talents is very much a confusing stories. It's easy to get side tracked to asking the wrong questions or being too simplistic. Maybe more than other parables it reveals how culture shapes our thinking and priorities.

A talent was equivalent to 15 years wages for a day labourer. So almost a biblical equivalent of winning the lottery. Each person in the story received a large sum of money. Upon first reading it's easy for us to be distracted by the amounts given. Was it fair that one should get ten when one only got one talent? How easily we forget that the focus really ought to be on the giver of the talents. Anything that these people received was a gift, it was not theirs, and they had not earned it. All three were given a large amount of money which meant they'd been charged with a responsibility. The responsibility was to use the gift wisely.

Life isn't fair. It gets mixed up with measures of what we think success is - Money, education, jobs, possessions, opportunities, . As if these are more important than relationships, our love, our commitment to God and to others. And we all have responsibilities. To some is given a lot, and a lot is expected of them. But let's get the focus of the parable right. This isn't a parable about us and our responsibilities. It's a parable about the kingdom and this life. The focus in the Kingdom of God is how much God has given, the graciousness, giving out of generosity, we know that it meant even to the extent of giving Jesus Christ himself, the teller of the story.

The second mistake that we can make though is to think this is a story about giving back our talents to God. That's not wrong, but there's a much deeper truth about the Kingdom here to discover. The story is told on the way to Jerusalem, near the end of Jesus ministry. Jesus had been talking about revolution, the destruction of the temple.

The disciples were wondering about when the revolution was coming, and how that would happen. You can imagine them as they squabble and debate the future. Tell the Pharisees and teachers of the law what for, and make them look foolish. Undermine the authorities at every turn. How would Jesus do it? Was there some hidden army waiting for the signal to besiege Jerusalem at Jesus command.

Jesus told this parable in answer to that kind of thinking. So what point is he making? He had no money to give them, so that's not it. But he was a teacher, and his trade was to give them his teachings, his ideas. That's what he'll leave them when he goes. He will leave his followers his teachings. For three years he had been teaching them with his teaching. Now he said, you're expecting me to overthrow the authorities and set up some revolution by some miracle? Oh no, all these months together I gave you the currency of the kingdom, and the revolution, if it comes, will be by your taking seriously what I gave to you.

As Jesus drew close to his destination, anxiety grew in his mind, and a sense of urgency. He must make sure he's told them everything they need to know. He must leave them with enough to be going on with, enough to live out their discipleship. He was relying on their collective memories because the time was fast approaching when they would sit together, in sorrow, and begin to share their stories of Jesus and what he told them, and it would be a comfort. But, a little while later, these stories would form the backbone of a much greater sharing of his life.

The stories and teaching he gave them were not just to listen to. They called for action. They changed people's lives. They asked them to face the things they didn't want to face up to, like changing their attitude towards their enemies and neighbours, like investing in people rather than possessions, like not trying to make themselves feel bigger by putting down others, like putting others first and seeking others good. Oh and so many more ways that called his friends to live a different way to others.

In the same way, we've been given teaching about love, and sharing, and peace in the everyday, but its hard to live it out. We haven't received easy answers, but we do know that we must love our neighbours, ie.other people. And this is the tough part of the story. There's a risk involved. When we do what we know to be right, it affects our jobs, our home life, our popularity, even our success. The point of the story is the risk of participating. The servant who got only one talent didn't steal anything from his master. He gave it all back. He was too caught up in himself to receive the gift. He never got involved.

And suddenly from big thoughts about the Kingdom of God, we are back to the focussed challenge of our calling as the people of God to ensure God is visible, to be involved, to make the Kingdom accessible for our generation. In the days of Brexit, Trump and Pandemic when it feels like the world has been taken over by the powerful and rich and accumulating wealth is prioritised over the wellbeing of children, when it seems like the exuberance and creativity of the young are ignored and the experience and wisdom of the older are shut away, when things are organised to favour the strong and wealthy, then the prophets speak remind us that mere human beings, whether political or religious, are never gods however much they style themselves as invincible. They have no right to power. They are mere idols displaying the worst of where our human weakness leads us, and the destructiveness, division we wreak when left on our own.

Then comes the voice that invites each of us to consider our involvement and our willingness to work out how to make God visible in and through our own lives, our words and actions. To make visible God's gift to the world of life and a constant reminder of the one true God as we await the Day of the Lord and the fulfilment of the Kingdom of peace and love.

Hymn Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Canticle

(Together)

***Christ, as a light
illumine and guide me.***

***Christ, as a shield
overshadow me.***

Christ under me;

Christ over me;

Christ beside me

on my left and my right.

***This day be within and without me,
lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.***

***Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;
in the mouth of each who speaks unto me.***

***This day be within and without me,
lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.***

Christ as a light;

Christ as a shield;

Christ beside me

on my left and my right.

Intercessions

O Christ who shares the road with us and leads us on the shadowy pathways, we turn to you.

You are the peace of all things calm

You are the place to hide from harm

You are the light that shines in dark

You are the heart's eternal spark

You are the door that's open wide

You are the guest who waits inside

You are the stranger at the door

You are the calling of the poor

You are my Lord and with me still

You are my love, keep me from ill
You are the light, the truth, the way
You are my Saviour this very day.

Surround with your peace, those who are anxious today, those who are fearful, those who are lonely, those who are angry, those who cannot see the way ahead.

Surround with your love, those who we have not seen for a while, those who are our sisters and brothers at Vic Meth, Redland Park, St Paul's and Cotham, and All Saints, those who we have worked with in Nightshelter, those we call family and friends.

Surround with your grace, those who attend AA meetings, those who are part of our coffee shops, those who are in fellowship in Tyndale Circle, those are part of babies and toddlers, those who sing in the choirs that rehearse in our buildings, those who come into the sphere of our witness to your living presence.

Surround with your healing, those who are suffering pain, those who are waiting for test results, those who have been abused, those who suffer from dementia, those who are exhausted, those who are depressed, those who have the virus.

Surround with your light and presence, those who wait with anticipation of new life, those who are waiting for new projects, work, colleagues to begin, those who are celebrating anniversaries and birthdays, those who are waiting for the fulfilment of new opportunities and possibilities.

O Christ who shares the road with us and leads us on. Shine your light to reveal our path, take the gifts you have grown in us and help us to tell your story of love for this world, walk beside us as companion, teacher and Saviour.
Amen

Words of Offering

We pause for this moment when we recognise the gifts we each bring to our common life, time and talents for the building of the Kingdom through Tyndale and beyond.

Let's pray:

God grant us the grace to see the needs of God's kingdom and respond with passion, kindness, generosity and hopefulness.

So we share the grace with each other:

The Grace is said: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.*

Hymn Abide with me

Blessing The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always.

Music Reflection *Hymn that was quoted by US President-elect in his victory speech* **On eagles wings**