

## Sermon for the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. Talented. Very talented.

How much do you have in the bank? You don't have to answer me, but would you like more?

If those talents in the parable today (Matthew 25:14-30) were gold, then each talent was worth about \$1.25 million dollars in today's value. Being given ten talents would be nice. I might just settle for one though, at a pinch. But ... it is a parable.

Please close your eyes and hold out your hands. How much have you got in your hands? Are they empty or full? Would you like more?

We know this parable about money is not really about money at all. It is more of a talent quest.

Don't worry. I am not going to ask anyone to get up and sing or dance or juggle. Though over morning tea you can if you want to! Is this talent quest about that kind of skills and abilities? What do you have there, in you, bubbling to get out? Your talents might be things like that, but it is about a lot more.

When you wondered whether your hands were full or empty, I wonder what you might have thought of? Did you think about the people who make your life richer, family and friends and maybe even the people sitting alongside you? Might the talent quest be about recognising the blessing of the people around you? Might it be that THEY are the enormously valuable resource in your hands? Yes. And more.

When you wondered about what fills your hands I wonder if there were so many things that, as in Jesus' words in Luke 6, it seems like a 'full measure, pressed down, shaken together and overflowing into your lap'? Do you feel the richness that is there in your hands?

What sort of things might be there, overflowing?

Strength, even when you may feel overwhelmed.

Hope, even when there may be dark clouds and fog.

Love, even when there may be dryness in relationships and connections.

Trust, even when it may be strained to breaking point.

Why would I have put each of those experiences at their point of being tested? It is because it is when they are tested we appreciate even more what we actually do have in our hands. It is easy to recognise love when we are simply immersed in it, but it is when it is felt at times of need, THEN we see that love more clearly and feel it more keenly. It is easy to count blessings lightly when life is unchallenging. My experience of life is that all those things shine more brightly and I recognise them in sharper detail when life is being put through the wringer. At those times I can count their value even more.

Are your hands full of opportunities and choices? As we grow older we look at opportunities differently. In our teens and 20s and 30s for most of us there are a myriad of possible futures, so many that choosing can be difficult, and from those ages we can often still return and take another path later. In our 40s and 50s the choices may be more limited and we begin to know that when we choose we are actually cutting off some possibilities for ever. As we get older the range of opportunities narrows, but it is never extinguished completely. There are always opportunities before us. If our eyes are open enough to recognise needs and what is happening around us, then there will be some way of contributing, some way of sharing out of who we are.

When we undertake exercises exploring vision, as we began last week, some people who are rich in years say to me that they don't know what to say or suggest because there is nothing that they can see that they can do. Yet is that true? Look again at those hands of yours. Are they really empty? As long as you have breath I dare to suggest that there is no-one with empty hands.

The talent quest is not to discover something out there. It is more like a mirror so that we recognise what is already here.

Parables have delightfully sharp edges. When Jesus posed that hypothetical I wonder how many in the crowd thought “oh good, God is going to give us something extra.”? I wonder how many of Jesus’ disciples were starting to count the things they would get later on, which would be their reward? They did some of that and Jesus had to shake them up a bit when they went on that tangent.

When Jesus told those stories which enraged the religious leaders of his day with the kick in the tail, they realised that he was telling a story about them. In this story Jesus wasn’t talking about a promise of some future reward but asking people to look again at what they already had in their hands. Whenever Jesus spoke about the ‘kingdom of heaven’ (as he was in this parable of the talents), he was never talking about some pie-in-the-sky time in the future or somewhere else. It was always a comment on how to live deeply in the here and now.

When I was first learning about preaching our class watched a video of a sermon from an African-American preacher. Some of his words stuck with me. “I don’t want some ‘pie in the sky when I die’. I want something sound on the ground while I’m still around!” That goes for the promises. It also goes for the challenges. Here and now is the time when we are blessed and our hands are full. The blessings from God in the kingdom of heaven are there in our hands.

The multiplication effect that Jesus was exploring in the parable comes when we use what is already there. How we deal with life, how we are built up and build others up, especially when life is hard. How we deal with riches and blessings, whether those things actually inspire generosity in us. How we deal with disagreements too. That is a big opportunity.

Remember Psalm 90, verse 12. “Teach so to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.” Those who have even more days to count hopefully have even more wisdom to apply in HOW we attend to the things that are in front of us, between us and especially how we interact with each other.

There are some disagreements which we don’t talk about, but maybe we should, with love and respect and trust. In this area about 50% of people answered YES to the plebiscite and about 50% said NO. I suspect that across our church community the same percentage applies. About 50% of us responded YES and about 50% responded NO. We have differences of opinion. Being different is not in itself a problem. How we deal with situations where we disagree is vitally important though.

We have an opportunity to witness to a better level of respect than has been shown in the community around us. I was speaking yesterday with a reporter from the ABC who asked with surprise if it was possible for people with different opinions on this question to be part of one church community. I assured him that it is, so long as there is respect and that we hold to what is more important, hold to what holds us together, our shared relationship with God. I hope I AM right!

When we can show love and respect and kindness, that builds trust and relationships. And in relationship we can find the strength to disagree and also learn from one another.

When we celebrate baptisms we light a candle for each person from the paschal candle, which is the reminder of Christ as the light of the world AND that we are called to be the light of the world, examples of God’s invitation, examples of life as God calls us to live life.

Look again at what is already in your hands, the blessings, the talents, the opportunities. You are talented. Very talented. How will those talents be multiplied in you?

Amen

**Paul Mitchell**