

**24<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost – St Paul’s Manuka – 19 November, 2017.  
Preacher: The Venerable Dr Brian Douglas**

**Judges 4: 1-10**

**Psalm 123**

**1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11**

**Matthew 25: 14-30**

The story Jesus tells us today in our Gospel reading is about a wealthy man who took a long trip. Before he left, the man divided his money among three servants asking them to look after it for him. The money in those days was measured in units called talents. One of the servants received five talents, a very large sum, another two talents and the last one received one talent. The first two servants invested their money in business projects and doubled the money that had been given to them. Clearly there was no world economic crisis or stock exchange crash in progress in those days nor was there a problem with interest rates. The third servant however hid the money so he wouldn't lose any of it. When the owner returned, he was thrilled with the first two servants since they had earned a great deal of interest. The master rewarded them with even more money, but he was angry with the third servant. The third servant was in big trouble - he had sat on his hands and not used his talent. He had not earned any money for his master with his one talent and his master was furious.

This story has implications for all us. God, the master, has given us all talents and we are expected to use them wisely and well. What are your talents? How do you use your talents? I don't just mean an amount of money here although of course money is one of the talents we have. Have you got a talent or gift, given to you by God and which is intended to be used? Perhaps your talent is your work or you are academically gifted, or you have the gift of creativity in art or writing or drama or music. Perhaps you are talented in sport or perhaps you have the gift of encouraging others and building relationship and friendship as you help other people grow. Some people have a talent for the service of others – helping them and reaching in ways that make a difference. Others have a talent for loving people in a way that builds them up, or perhaps a talent for making friends and simply enjoying life. Your talent might be leadership or skills of organisation. Whatever the talent, we all have them. God has generously graced our lives with a variety of talents and we have a responsibility to use them wisely and well.

The great responsibility we all have though is to use our talents in the way God intends them to be used, to help ourselves and to help other people. When we use our talents in this way we give praise to God and we are of use to our community. We use our talents as God intends we proclaim the kingdom of God and we make God's presence known in the world.

In life though, the saddest things is when people do not use or when they hide their talents or when they are not given or denied the opportunity to use them. Sometimes because of fear or lack of encouragement or even because of unfair criticism, people keep their talents hidden or they are disabled from using them. Sometimes people are too greedy to share their talents with others and they want to keep it all to themselves. Sometimes the way that we react to others prevents them from using our talents in the way God intended.

Talents do not need to be spectacular. Some talents are spectacular but others are very ordinary. Ordinary talents can be very special.

I heard the story the other day about a dog called Laika, an eleven pound mongrel from Russia. Laika was a street dog who lived in Moscow in the middle of a bitter winter. It was for this reason she was selected at three years of age to be the first Russian in space. In November, 1957 she was launched into space in Sputnik 2. She had the talent of responding well to training and being calm and so she qualified for the job. She could withstand the cold and could live for long periods without food. The street life she lived had trained her well. Little was known about the effects of space on living things and so Laika had to go and find out. Her talent for calmness and withstanding deprivation qualified her for the task and it killed her. She died alone in space as there was no plan to bring her back. Laika is memorialised now in a statue in Russia that lists her as a pioneer in space. Even the most humble of talents – the calmness of a dog – are important. So many of the saints of God are like this – their talent is ordinary and yet very special.

Each of us has a great responsibility to encourage the talent in others. It is too easy to criticise other people and so disable them. It is much harder to encourage them and support them and help them as we grow together. We all have the talent and gift of encouragement, but for some it is rarely used,

especially if we are so intent on getting our own way or securing our position of power.

But what about the servant who buried the talent in the ground. He had been given a great deal of money. If we converted the one talent to today's standard of money it comes to about three thousand dollars. He had been given a great deal, yet he chose not to use it. Why? Perhaps he was afraid of his master or lacked the creative urge to use it. Perhaps he was scared of making a mistake. Perhaps he was frightened of what others might say. Whatever the reason, his talent was buried and it went unused. The talent was still there, its value had not been taken away, but it was not on show. It was not used and it did not grow and develop. He refused to use his talent and he hid it away and so he did not receive the further blessing of abundance from the master. When we use God's gifts in the way that God intended God blesses us more and more and we receive more and more.

Sometimes we think that the talents we have are so small in comparison to the talents of others. Remember the third servant received the least of his master's gifts. The other two servants had been given a great deal more. But even so, the least of the master's gifts was still a great amount and its value was abused by not being used. Sometimes we are like that third servant and we think that our talents are so little compared to talents of other people. If we think like this we become paralysed into inaction. We are too frightened to move and we bury ourselves in fear, like the third servant buried his money, and we achieve very little. God gives us gifts to use and God expects that we will use them wisely and responsibly in the kingdom of God.

These are big and important questions for us as Christians to consider.

Everyone of us has talent, in some way or another – even a mongrel dog from the bitterly cold street of Moscow. God has gifted us with talents and God wants us to use them, in God's service and in the service of people. This is part of the generosity of God. Part of that giftedness is the desire and the willingness to not only use our own talents, but to encourage others in the use of their talents. It is only as we use our talents and as we encourage others in the use of their talents, that those talents will grow and develop. It when we use our talents and let others use their talents that the kingdom of God is proclaimed, that God's kingdom reigns and Christ lives in our world.

For us as Christian people we come to God regularly in our life and prayers, in our worship and work. Day by day and week by week we are fed by God as we hear God's word and as we receive the sacraments together. It is this generosity of God that helps us to grow and to recognise our talents and then to use them wisely and well. May God be with you as you realise your talents and then use them for the service of God and other people and for the proclamation of God's kingdom here on earth as we await the kingdom to come.