

# The Parable of the Talents

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*A sermon given on the Second Sunday before Advent, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020, by the Associate Vicar, the Revd Wendy Wale, in the Online Communion Service.*

*Matthew 25:14-30.*

I'm delighted to be speaking to you today from the Frith chair here in Beverly Minster, the Frith chair or Peace Stool is one of the oldest artifacts belonging to the minster going back to Anglo-Saxon times. And I imagine that you might be listening to this from your chair at home, but hopefully it's an armchair and a little bit warmer and more comfortable than this one. Just thinking about this, because I think they're probably all spending quite a lot more time at home, sat watching the television or listening to the radio during this second lockdown, and I wonder how many of you over the past few months have become armchair experts?

Let me explain. A few nights ago, I was watching Only Connect, which is a quiz show where the contestants have to work out the link between four seemingly random words or pictures or pieces of music and on the screen at this point were 16 words, and they had to find which groups they went in. And I knew that four of them what types of potato, which is really obvious, if you know your Anya your Russet and your Rooster.

But the contestants didn't and they just couldn't find the connection. It's very rare that I can, but when I can, I'm there shouting at the television, pointing saying, "Come on, come on, it's that one. That one. And it's really obvious. No, no!" If only they had the benefit of my armchair expertise, my pointing and yelling. I wonder how many of us at times are world class footballers, Michelin starred bakers or mastermind winners, all from the comfort of our own living room.

I have to admit that I sometimes feel like that when I'm reading this parable, the one we just heard. It's easy, isn't it, to hear it from the safety of our own seats here in church or sitting at home, with modern understanding and to celebrate the slaves who took the risk and doubled their master's investment to internally shout at the one who just dug a hole and hid his talent in the ground. Risk is easy and exciting, when you're not the one in the middle of taking it.

We don't know much about the servants in the story, but we can assume that they would have known their master's property and investments pretty well, and he trusts them with a

lot. It's worth pointing out that a talent would have been about 15 years worth of a servant's wages. Even the man who just got one talent to look after, he had a huge drop in his hand. The armchair experts are suddenly on the stage in the spotlight, doing the very thing that they had previously just observed from a safe distance without any risk.

And what struck me afresh, reading this parable in the midst of a global pandemic, is that since March, most of us have found ourselves having to face new and sometimes overwhelming situations and responsibilities. And if we're honest, we probably wish that we could just bury our heads in the ground, wake up when it's all over. On a simple level, I've gone from being an armchair expert who could take a happy picture and post it on Facebook to a quivering wreck at the thought of all the cables and sound systems and knowing which buttons to press in order to film services like this one; prayers, music, meetings, if you could see what I can see now, it's incredible. I've had to call out for help, and I'm incredibly grateful for those who have learnt more than me and quicker than me. But we've all done things that we've never imagined: worn masks; been tracked and traced; shut the doors of the church; zoomed; self-isolated; ran out of toilet roll. Many people have worked harder and in more demanding circumstances than ever before. Others have lost secure jobs, simply can't find a job because their industry is locked down, bankrupt or currently non-existent. Anyone living with an underlying health condition, mental or physical, has had to deal with a lack of appointments and support, additional risk from fear; so many trying to deal with it in isolation.

The heart of this parable, however, isn't about a pandemic, but it is about something new, something that was spreading rapidly and something that many people didn't like. It's talking about the message of Jesus's kingdom and what we do with it. Jesus called his followers to do things very differently, to take responsibility in a whole new way, to literally turn their lives and the world upside down: the first shall be last and the last shall be first; blessed are the poor in spirit and those who mourn and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; anyone who does not welcome a child, does not welcome me; anybody who feeds the naked, poor or hungry, is doing my will; forgive as I have forgiven; pray for those who persecute you. Jesus is turning the security of organised, self-serving religion on its head, challenging the position of the religious leaders who held all the power and status and instead, placing the talent, the yeasts, the mustard seeds of faith in the hands of everyday people; offering them each a great treasure and wealth and inviting them to spread, share it and grow it.

Jesus's harsh condemnation in the parable of the servant who simply buried his talent would have been a foreshadowing of what those who wish to bury his kingdom message would seek to do to him, casting him into outer darkness, cut off from all humanity. His message of radical love and inclusion is not to be buried, hidden or ignored, but invested, multiplied and shared widely. It is perhaps a challenge to us today when we are tempted to become armchair experts with our faith: it is so much easier to criticise the church; to blame our leaders for their failure to do the things we felt were right; to take offense when nobody phones us or meets our particular need; to simply shout at God because we could do it so much better than everyone else, in the comfort of our living room.

Here's the thing. In the kingdom of God, we are the servants with the talents. Jesus gave it all away on the cross. His powerful message of forgiveness, love and justice, inclusion, hope and resurrection are put into each of our hearts every time we receive the bread and the wine, physically and spiritually.

There are no armchair experts in the kingdom of God - each of us has a part to play, either small or large. We have to take the risk of loving the world that Jesus came to save: its beauty; its brokenness. We can't do it alone. In the power of his spirit, in the company of all the saints, we can make the connections, show the love, and work to see his kingdom come, his will be done. Amen

# Reading Text

Matthew 25:14-30

<sup>14</sup> "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup> But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>22</sup> And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>24</sup> Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." <sup>26</sup> But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."