

## Matthew 25:14-30 - Sermon for 8am

This passage from Matthew was one of the most significant for me in my decision to explore ordained ministry. It therefore means a lot to me. If we are all servants of God, and we have all been given so many gifts, talents and resources, then how can we possibly keep them to ourselves and not use them in God's service? They aren't ours in the first place and they certainly can't remain ours alone if we take seriously the servanthood to which we are all called. This isn't to say that everyone should be ordained, but it is to say that we should all be asking the question; am I using the gifts that God has given me for the service of him above all else?

In the passage, Jesus is carrying on describing the kingdom of heaven in different ways. A man goes away on a journey and before he goes, he entrusts his property to his servants, each according to their ability. It is God's property that is entrusted, not ours. This stops us dead in our tracks if we start thinking too much of ourselves and our abilities. They are all God's gifts, loaned to us for his service. Our skills are God's. Our money is God's. Our time is God's. As we say in prayer after the offering – all things come from God, and of his own to we give him! There's no room for pride, except pride in our master.

The property being God's also stops us from going down the road of picking and choosing which of our skills and resources we use for God and which we don't, and also of drawing barrier lines around our abilities, time and money. When we work in an office, we use our God-given abilities for his glory. When we look after our grandchildren, we use our God-given time and love. When we give our money, we give God's money for his cause. When we pray, we simply use the time that God has given us to seek his hand in the world and seek his glory. Nothing is our own. We have all been gifted by God and therefore we are all beholden to his service in all of it. We can't say, "OK God, Sunday is yours, but the rest of the week is mine". We can't say, "OK God, I'll keep you happy with a little donation to church or charity each month, and then you'll leave me alone". We can't say "my mind is yours, but the rest of my life – my loves, my hobbies, my sense of humour – is none of your business." God disallows any boxes – all things are from him and he expects his servants to serve!

To those who serve him well, his investment in each of us is rewarded. How amazing will it be to hear those words from God "Well done, my good and trustworthy servant"? God entrusts to the faithful. Interestingly, there's no hint of an investment going wrong and God's talents becoming lost. This becomes an interesting speculation for another day on what it means to faithfully serve God all our lives and not see any tangible fruit of our service. Perhaps that is actually impossible – all God's investments grow if his servants are faithful, but perhaps we don't see it?

However, our eyes are drawn to the third servant - the one who buried his talent in the ground. He gives back to his master all that was entrusted to him – unused and ungrown. He hadn't even put the money in the bank to gain interest. It isn't a matter of fear of investment failure, because at least the bank would have been a safe deposit and a small rate of interest. Instead, the servant had done nothing other than to bury what he had been given where no-one else could find it. The servant is punished severely. And I wonder how we feel about that? Does it seem unfair? After all the master didn't lose out at all.

However, the point is that the servant didn't even do the minimum he was required to do. I wonder why? Could it be that to put the talent in the bank, the servant would have to acknowledge his relationship with his master – the one with the reputation that we read about? Maybe the servant didn't want to be associated with him? Maybe he put his relationship with his peers, with the other

influences in the world around him, and with his friends ahead of his duty to his master. If that's the case, no wonder his master came home and saw straight through him. By burying his talent, he wasted the chance to serve his master but he kept his other relationships intact and unchanged. He didn't have to be "out there" in the world with his God-given abilities, resources, time and money. He didn't have to associate with his master's reputation at all.

I wonder how much this rings true for us. The Kingdom of heaven is one where we are all servants of God and where everything we have and everything we can do are all investments from God for use within his Kingdom. I wonder whether we struggle with the temptation to dissociate ourselves from God sometimes in public? I wonder if we struggle with separating our own skills, money and time from Gods, when God has claim on it all? I wonder if we are embarrassed to be known as people who serve God actively, or whether we place strict limits on this service so that it remains buried and unseen by those around us? I wonder whether we put God in a box that we can close and open at will?

If we long to hear those words, "well done my good and trustworthy servant – enter into my joy", then we must be transformed into members of God's kingdom who understand that everything is from God and all belongs to him. We must seek to invest well all that he has given us, no matter our job, our calling and our stage of life. God keeps investing in us and we must remain his faithful and trustworthy servants to the end. Amen.