

Morning Worship for November 15th; 2nd before Advent

Preparation

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:
the whole earth is full of his glory.

Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength;
ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name.

The whole earth is full of his glory.

The Lord shall give strength to his people;
the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:
the whole earth is full of his glory.

Opening Prayer

Holy God,

faithful and unchanging:

**enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,**

that we may truly worship you,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

And he will sustain you.

Create in us clean hearts O God:

And renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence:

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Give us the joy of your saving help:

And sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day:

The God of our salvation who bears our burdens.

We confess our sins.

God the Father forgives us in Christ

and heals us by the Holy Spirit.

Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness,

all slander and malice,

and confess our sins to God our redeemer.

(cf Ephesians 4.30,32)

Come, let us return to the Lord and say:

Lord our God,

in our sin we have avoided your call.

Our love for you is like a morning cloud,

like the dew that goes away early.

Have mercy on us;

deliver us from judgement;

bind up our wounds and revive us;

in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May almighty God,

who sent his Son into the world to save sinners,

bring you his pardon and peace,

now and for ever. **Amen.**

Praise

O Lord, open our lips:

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Let us worship the Lord:

All praise to his name.

Gloria in Excelsis

Glory to God in the highest,

and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King,

almighty God and Father,

we worship you, we give you thanks,

we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,

you take away the sin of the world:

have mercy on us;

you are seated at the right hand of the Father:

receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,

you alone are the Lord,

you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,

with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The word of God

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians.

Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. This is the word of the Lord: **Thanks be to God**

(1 Thessalonians 5:1–11)

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew:

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus said to his disciples, 'The kingdom of heaven is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 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." 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." 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." 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." 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; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." 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? 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. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This is the Gospel of the Lord: **Praise to you, O Christ**

(Matthew 25:14–30)

A reflection by Gordon Gray

This is a Gospel story that causes me a big problem. I have heard so many interpretations of what is traditionally known as "The Parable of the Talents," yet I don't remember any of them convincing me.

When a parable starts with a master doing things it is common for us to interpret that master as either God or Jesus; but the things this master is accused of doing and his description bear no relation to any picture of God that we might have. It certainly isn't a parable about talents in the sense of skills (singing, dancing, taking selfies). No, a talent was a very large sum of money and that is the way his first listeners would have interpreted it especially as this is a story told by Jesus in the Temple in the days between his triumphal ride into Jerusalem and his crucifixion.

I'm more and more inclined to think that it actually has everything to do with money and banking and oppression and power, and about one poor, faithful, slave who stood up to it all and was punished for it. Effectively an analogy of what happened to Jesus.

First the money. Most of what we would think of today as commercial trade or "investing" in Palestine was done by what we call today the wealthy one percent - rich people, royalty and the priests (who took in and spent investments held in the temple, and then traded with them for foreign goods and currency).

There were two common ways that one could make a profit from investing; first by lending to those involved in the currency exchange business in the Temple. When Jews or others came to Jerusalem from other parts of the

world, they needed to change their international currency into the local Jewish currency, and the exchange tables served this purpose. International Jews in particular needed to make a sacrifice in the Temple, but usually only carried Roman currency, so they exchanged it for local currency. If you've travelled abroad you'll know that high exchange rates and fees yield a very high income.

The second form of investment was in mortgage loans or bridging loans to small farmer families struggling to stay afloat in the declining first century Palestinian economy. Most loans made huge returns on their investment because interest rates were so astronomically high by today's standards--anywhere between 25 to 50%. The purpose of these loans was primarily for the purpose of getting borrowers in over their heads and then being foreclosed on and losing their property. They would then either become tenants on what had been their own property, or homeless, or join the ranks of the growing number of bandits.

Much of the income from the first century loans was deposited in the Temple to enable the rich to avoid paying a Roman tax on it, and also to keep them from officially being the holders of the debt when the Sabbath and Jubilee-debt-cancellation years rolled around. A law called the "Prosbul" allowed them put their money in the Temple just before the year when debts were to be cancelled so that they could claim that they no longer had the money and were not able to cancel the debt. Then, that money held in the Temple, would be invested elsewhere by the priests who were the financial overseers of the "Temple bank's" holdings. There are a number of ancient inscriptions that show Priests investing in trade and commodities using this "tax-sheltered" money drawn from mortgages taken out by poor families in rural Palestine. That's probably one of the reasons why Jesus decided to occupy the Temple and set up a temporary boycott of currency trading there as his first official act in Jerusalem. And it is almost certainly why--when the revolution finally came--the angry 99 percenters stormed the temple and burned the mortgage papers that had been held there.

It was also common, as the parable indicates, for wealthy lenders to pass the dirty tasks of giving the loans, and collecting on them, and then repossessing the properties, down to their servants. It was considered dishonourable for nobility to be seen to expand their wealth, and since servants were considered to be a class without honour, they were given the job. That gave the lenders the ability to deny any knowledge of wrongdoing if an evicted family's misery became too public.

It's worth adding here that the servants who were entrusted with inflicting this pain on people didn't necessarily do it for monetary gain (they were rarely paid anything). Instead they did it for the power and prestige they received for successfully managing the company. As the parable says, if they were successful in little, they would be given extra power and responsibility. Also reflected here is that interest rates were often as high as 50%, so it would not be at all unlikely for a steward of a powerful finance family to double or even triple an investment.

In the story, servants one and two clearly went along with this insidious system and were well rewarded for their efforts. Translating Matthew's Greek words the first put his money into commodity trading, and the second used interest-bearing investments like the loans and currency-trading, and both made a healthy profit.

But the third slave (invariably the hero in three-part tales), following the Torah that forbade lending money at interest believed that the system was corrupt, that the master was evil, that money should not be used as a weapon against homes and farms and families, and he refused to participate. He accused the wealthy one percenter of being violent, rough, offensive, and thoroughly intolerable. He accuses him of not actually doing anything to get his wealth: he doesn't plant, he doesn't share his wealth. He just collects interest on it from the misery of people who were sucked into the downwardly spiralling system.

So he denounces the crime, buries the money, and gets crucified for his trouble. It is telling that he put the money in the ground, which according to Leviticus is ultimately owned by God. Maybe the parable is saying that he gave the money back to God, the ultimate owner.

So I am suggesting that Jesus was telling it as it was, albeit dressed in the form of a parable. Perhaps Jesus was simply saying that if you stand up and denounce an immoral, evil, system, you may find yourself having to pay for it. Perhaps Jesus was saying that sometimes it is right to offer up your life to counter the injustice, even if it means losing that life.

Perhaps the message of the story is simply that the story was as true then as it is today, and that if we don't like it, what are we going to do about it?

Our faith

Let us declare our faith in God Father, Son and Holy Spirit

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,**

**he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession led by Dave Cousins

Lord we pray for the Church throughout the world that it would be granted and filled with courage to proclaim the Good News to all. We pray for our fellow brothers and sisters who are intimidated and abused for their Christian faith by secular authorities or adherents to other faiths. Grant them the comfort and the joy to know that they do Christ's work. We confess Lord that here we sometimes flag and do not have the zeal to make disciples of all people. Renew and uplift our hearts to the task you set us.

We pray for our church leaders at diocesan and local level that they may lead your church in the ways that you ordain.

Lord in Your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

Give wisdom, Lord, to all in authority, not only leaders of nations but local communities, that actions and words are prompted by the needs of others, not personal gain. That all might ask the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' and, as if seeing through your eyes, want nothing but the best for them. We lift before you Lord those in authority who are tackling the Coronavirus pandemic both in this country and throughout the world that you would imbue them with resolve and clear thinking. We thank you that the first vaccines have been developed and in our own country we pray that the

final stage testing and regulatory approval would be successful and for an expeditious and safe roll out to those who need inoculation first.

We pray for the United States and for the change in presidency. We pray that this would be done without complication and rancour and that harmony between different groups would be maintained. We pray for President elect Biden that you would bless his presidency that it would be a force for reunification of the nation and that the US would play its part in the key challenges of our age; on climate change, trade and ethical and democratic government.

Lord in Your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

We pray Lord God, that you would help us to love those whom we find it difficult to love. Give us a heart that reaches out to those we would otherwise ignore. Give us the strength not to cross on the other side of the road, but to play the part of the Samaritan. This will not be easy, Lord. It is not in our nature. We spread our love thinly among those we can relate to, those who share our values, and those who do not threaten our comfortable lifestyle.

It's not easy, Lord, and on our own we shall fail. But with your help all things are possible. You led the way, and it is your example that we look to. You turned the values of this world upside down. Do the same with us, Lord. Help us live the reality of your Love.

Lord in Your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

We think of all those in any kind of need at this time; for those struggling in body mind and soul. We especially remember before God those for whom separation from family and friends during lockdown is a real trial. Healing God, bless those on a journey of recovery from illness or surgery. Grant strength, patience, and freedom from pain. Bring restoration of health through your Spirit's power. Reach out and touch them, so they know you are there, bringing comfort and light even in the darkest of times.

Lord in Your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

We pray too for those who have recently departed this earthly life and for those left behind. God of love and mercy, embrace all those whose hearts today overflow with grief, unanswered questions and such a sense of loss. Grant them space to express their tears. Hold them close through the coming days.

We think too of those who have gone before us and whose names are written this week in our book of remembrance. Heavenly Father we give

thanks for the souls of those departed who have already run this earthly race that they may rest in your eternal embrace.

Lord in Your Mercy: Hear our Prayer

And finally a prayer for ourselves for the coming week.

Dear Lord, Thank you for fresh grace and a week full of promise. Lead us in Your way and fill our hearts with your love and joy. Help us to see others as You see them. Guide every decision, response, effort and conversation we individually have for your glory.

Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

A prayer for the coronavirus pandemic

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

We join together with Christians throughout the world in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Conclusion

The Collect for the day

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son was revealed to destroy the works of the devil and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life: grant that we, having this hope, may purify ourselves even as he is pure; that when he shall appear in power and great glory we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power.

For you have created all things,
and by your will they have their being.

You are worthy, O Lamb, for you were slain,
and by your blood you ransomed us for God.

From every tribe and language and nation,
**you have made us to be a kingdom and priests
serving our God.**

To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
**be blessing and honour and glory and might
for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 4.11;5.9b,10,11)**

We end with the words of the Grace, an ancient Christian prayer of fellowship, remembering that although we are not together in person, nothing can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Please let us know if you want us to pray for you either individually or if you would like to be included on the Prayer Chain.

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Reverend Joy Cousans; Reverend Stephen Burge

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