

We are living in the time after the cross, after Jesus victory, living in resurrection time, knowing the Lord is with us by his Spirit; in the time when our faith is being tested and purified, as gold is purified by heat; like Jesus, we are undergoing conflict on our way to the kingdom.

So how are we to live in this time. Well, Jesus summarised it – love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and love our neighbour as yourself.

Two parables, from the shadow of the cross, reinforce this message. Last week the parable of the ten maidens, showed us five whose faith was active, alert, alive; ready to greet Jesus in the joys and trials of life. It's a parable of loving God, living in relationship with Jesus, strengthened through prayer, by Jesus' word, by the Holy Spirit's presence, by thanksgiving and worship –seeking God with a good and pure heart.

The parable of the talents concerns loving our neighbour as ourselves, with Jesus unselfish concern for others. The parable speaks of trading with our talents – entering into the give and take of life, the market place of human existence, serving with the gifts entrusted to us

God has given us all the gift of life, of strength, of thought and emotion, and to each one of us special gifts, skills and abilities. And these are given not for our selfish advantage, but to hold in trust for God; to use for our sisters and brothers in the church, and our neighbours in the world.

We have these great gifts God for the in-between time, this time

*it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them - to each according to his ability. Then he went away.*

God has entrusted his property to us; his gifts; his holy spirit; his work of saving people, body and soul. It's a great trust. The gift is our whole life; the whole of our existence. As our holy communion says, it is for all times and in all places. Being a Christian is not a part time occupation.

Now the talents in the parable -

A talent was a weight of gold or silver; scholars greatly disagree about the actual weight, but the minimum is 20kg; if the third servant was given only one talent, 20kg of gold it still represented a huge investment. He could hardly complain.

For us, a talent has come to mean not money but an ability we are born with, natural and or God given. So when we read this parable we are inclined to think of the talents as our personal, special gifts.

The critics are divided over whether this is how to understand the meaning of talents; are they our special abilities; or do they represent the full life and service we each bring to the world.

I tend to think the latter. Some people have a great gift of evangelism. Others are gifted pastors. But our life and service is far more than that surely; we give to good causes, stand up for justice, pray with the sick, help people cross the road, turn the other cheek.

You see, everything about us is a gift. Our life is a gift, our history is gift, our bodies, our relationships, our education – it's all a gift. 1 Corinthians 4:7 says *What do you have that you did not receive.*

Everything comes to us; from our genes; from family we are born into; from the psychology developed in us by our environment; by the gift of God of being who we are.

By faith we understand that the giver, who works all things in everyone and everything, is God.

In this resurrection time how should we live; well Colossians 3:23 *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.* The talent that the man buried represents not just one dimension of our existence, no matter how important, but failing to live our whole life in the light – and in the freedom and love - of God.

The man who hid his talent in the ground; there's a bit of him in all of us. That bit of us that thinks of God as demanding, God on the watch to crack down on our mistakes, God the hard taskmaster. Faith then is more about keeping on the right side of this intolerant God; we aren't loving the Lord very much at all. We're forgetting that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son for us; and the central thing Jesus revealed about God; that he is our Father in heaven, a loving Father; so willing to do everything necessary to bring us through, to renew our hearts, to enable us to live according to Christ.

We think I knew that you were a harsh man, so I was afraid, and hid your talent in the ground'.

It's possible to be so wrapped up in ourselves that we never get round to living the Christian life - to loving our neighbour in any practical way.

Ver and over scripture calls us to be not afraid; it's what the shepherds were told, Mary was told; the word of the Lord came to Abraham saying, Do not be afraid Abraham, I am your shield, your very great reward.

The useless servant's excuse was, So I was afraid

The very thing that God tells us not to be.

There is a fear of God that is pure – it is the awed respect of the creature before the creator. But there is a fear of God that starts from mistrust.

Have you ever tried to take a plaster off an eight year old boy; a plaster on some cut on a tender part; a filthy old plaster full of germs that needs removing; how they squirm and whimper and scream. And how small and brief the pain really is. And we wonder at the fact that these kids we love so much don't trust us to be doing the best for them

I think that's how we are with our fear before God. And you know the best thing is – just rip it off. Rip off the fear. But we let God in tiny tug by tiny tug – ooh stop stop. All we can think of is the plaster being ripped off; instead of getting it over with and doing something useful for someone.

But as long as our focus is fearfully on ourselves we are going to find it difficult to get our attention on the needs of our neighbours

So the message of the parable is – put your life at God's disposal; commit your way to him; say, this is me, as far as I now me; I am yours. And mean it

As for our fear, it's time to see that as a sin; fear is selfish; it does not befit one created by God, and saved by Christ who faced and endured every fear, and all pain, willingly, on the cross for us. From the power of that sacrifice on the cross he pours out forgiveness, forgiveness for all we have failed to be and do. Ask him to pull off the plaster fear by his spirit, and cleanse you.

God's call is on our whole life; but a final point; don't think this means there is no rest, no leisure. Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, set apart from the business of working for a living; for rest from the harassment of money, competition, struggle; the sabbath is for refreshment. God's will is that we take rest. Giving our whole life to God does not mean *no rest*; but it does mean taking our rest, as Christians. It's not a day off from faith. We should not be

such doers as not to give time to loving the Lord our God. Each day needs a space with God, alone, in quietness; finding strength and direction for the task of using our gifts for the service of humanity and glory of God, amen