

Parable of the Talents

Christ Church Chineham 23rd March- 9am & 10.30
God's investments in us

Once upon a time there were three pelicans. these pelicans were going to fly to their favourite lake. A lake with good food stocks and plenty of space. As they flew each Pelican became wrapped up in their own thoughts.

1. The first Pelican thought as it flew 'how beautiful is my beak, how absolutely perfect, in fact, it is such a splendid beak , when I get to the lake I'm going to walk up and down the shoreline with my beak held high, so that everybody can admire its beauty. Some may even be jealous of such a glorious beak.
2. The second pelican was also lost in thought as he flew. He too looked down at his beak. Wow, he thought, this is a beautiful beak, I'm sure there is no beak more splendid than mine. When I get to the lake, I must be careful to keep this beak in good condition always. I will stay in the shadows of the lake, and only catch small fish so that my beak is never at risk of any damage or of being overused.
3. Meanwhile, the third pelican thought as it flew, 'this is such a good beak that I have. So beautifully designed, so perfect for catching fish, it is just so strong, so big and just so practical as fish catcher. As soon as I get to the lake, I'm going to head for the deepest part, where the biggest fish are and I am going to catch the biggest fish you can imagine,

because that's just what a beak like this is made for, I am going to be such an excellent fishing Pelican!

that is and that is exactly what they did is. Of course, all three pelicans used their beaks but only one used it to its full potential. Only one took the risk of pushing that beak to the limits of what it could do.

so now let us come to this parable of the talents in Matthews gospel. It is a parable or an allegory, a story from which we can learn deeper truths. The story starts with a master about to depart on a long journey. Before leaving he summons three of his servants and entrust each with a large sum of money to take care of in his absence.

The first thing to note is that a talent was a measurement of weight of money; it was not a type of money itself. In Jesus's time, a talent weighed about 130pounds. But in silver coins a talent was a considerable sum, equivalent to 10 to 15 years' worth of a working man's wage. So the first thing to note here is the talent was a great very great sum indeed, the master was investing a huge amount in his servants here. Investing not only in monetary standards, but also in his trust of his servants.

Of course when we read a story today, we naturally think of physical talents. A talent being person's natural aptitude and ability or inclination. The word meaning shifted in Medieval Latin from the balance or weight of a sum of money to 'Talenta' meaning an inclination, a leaning, a

desire of the will. This is how, through Latin, ancient French and then into English that the word travelled.

So back to the text. The Master, it tells us, entrusted his property to the servants. He trusts, he does not give them instructions on how the money is to be used or what they are to do with it, it appears if you like a gift of grace but one for which there is an accounting at the end, a responsibility. It is a huge amount of investment he is making in the servants and the responsibility is for them to take the initiative and use what they are given to achieve the best they can with it.

Each servant is given a quantity of talents according to his ability. This is a key point. Not only does the master give generously, he gives appropriately. He knows his servants well. He calls them individually, he knows their abilities, and to each he gives generously, but also according to what he knows they are capable of dealing with.

We are that not all are created as the same, equal in all things, but the Lord knows our abilities, our strengths and our weaknesses. Each of us is unique, uniquely created by a Creator God and each of us is given unique talents or gifts fit for who we are.

The master divvy's up his huge investment. To the first servant, he gives five talents, to the second he gives two talents, to the third servant, he gives one's talent . Each given according to their ability. Even the third servant, the

servant with one talent, has been given a huge amount of responsibility, the equivalent of 10 to 15 years wages placed into his control. This is a generous master a master willing to invest so much and to trust so much in his servants.

This story shows the greatness of God's grace. Even the one who receives the least receives a great deal indeed. What God invests in us is like seeds, the seeds of potential. Like seeds, potential within us that is not nurtured and fed and attended to, will never even germinate. Seeds of potential not used and developed, will remain just that, unbroken seeds.

There are no instructions tied' to this gift from the master. The servants are given freedom to make their own choices. It tells us that the first servant and a second servant respond immediately. They seem to tackle this project with urgency.

They went to work 'doing', & being pro-active. Theirs is an example of how to watch for the Lord's coming, the Lords return. In the previous parable, the parable of the bridesmaids waiting for the groom, theirs was a much more passive waiting . but here the servants take responsibility, and whilst waiting for the Lord's return, they act and use the talents that they had been given and use them wisely. They traded them to create more. Their masters investment was doubled by each of these servants. The

thing is that the servants only achieved this by being pro-active....by taking risks in trading their talents but by doing so wisely. Like seeds planted and watered, their talents grew.

The third servant, the one with the least amount of talents but still a huge investment made by the master, takes a different route. He decides to dig a hole and bury his master's money, he hid the talent. In his day to bury money was considered quite a safe thing to do. Jews were not allowed to take interest on money when invested with other Jews. However, if it was invested we Gentiles, interest could indeed be gained. this servant took no risks, in fact he took no action. Burying the money was all he did, hiding it from others and from himself. This was potential not being used; this was the masters investment being wasted.

God has invested talents & gifts each according to our individual abilities for God knows us well, better than we know ourselves. God has invested in us talents, seeds of potential. We need to be pro- active in finding where our true potential lies. When we discover our God given gifts we must nurture them, develop them, risk failure even in order to grow those seeds of potential within us.

God is'nt expecting us all to be super heroes. However God also knows just how much we can each achieve if only we would dare!

And what does such courageous daring bring.....well when it comes to using what God has given us and using it for Gods glory, for Kingdom building stuff..... I believe we find a place of true human flourishing, spiritual flourishing.

Back to our servants. It tells us that after a long wait the master returns. The servants had no way of knowing when their master would return, but return he does to settle accounts with them. There is an accounting for what they have done with the talents. Both the first and the second slave are praised highly by the master. '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' it says. Both slaves are treated in exactly the same way. Both were apportioned different amounts of talents, and yet both doubled the amount they were originally given. Obviously the first of those slaves was apportioned more at the beginning and consequently would have given a greater financial reward at the end but both were rewarded on quality, not on the quantity. They may not have been equal at the beginning, but they were equal in their efforts, and now they were equal in the reward of their master. And the reward they received was yet more responsibility greater trust, and entering into the joy of the master a deeper relationship with their master.

The third servant, the timid servant, who took the safe route. The inactive route of burying the money, of doing nothing with the money rather than take risk or action. he

too is called to account by the master. The third servant quickly blames the master and his fear of the master for his own lack of initiative with the money. This was an action of self-preservation, for which he blames the master himself. He shows contempt of the Masters investments, accusing the master himself of 'reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not scatter seeds'. This servant, like Adam blaming Eve and the serpent, takes no responsibility for his actions, or lack of them. Everything the master has done so far has shown him to be a generous and fair master, yet the third slave who says he knows him, accuses him of being hard, and even unfair. This servant then loses what he has been given, and loses permanently any relationship with his master. He had been trusted but found wanting. The masters faith in him had been betrayed in every sense.

Some see the third slave as an allusion to the Pharisees and Scribes at the time of Jesus, in their attitude to law and truth. For they had tried to build a fence around the law, causing paralysis of religion and truth in their anxiety. They had become removed from the secular, aloof and separate. They had buried themselves so much within the law, that they were then terrified of being contaminated by those outside the law. The sinners, the Gentiles. They had been unwilling to take risks and safeguarded their own security. Their piety had removed them from the people. In contrast, Jesus sent his disciples out into the world, into the

messiness of the world. He sent them to mix with the sinners, the poor, the sick, the lonely and the disenfranchised of society. You can see how his ministry was completely radical and challenging to the Jewish authorities of the day.

But more than this, Jesus was willing to risk all, to risk all, so that all might live. Live life to its fullness, as God intended. To live lives that reach their full potential their place of human flourishing, a life of freedom in Christ. Christ died on the cross to pay the price for all sin past present and future. he broke down the fences built by the Pharisees and scribes, tore down the curtain in the temple separating the sacred from the ordinary and enabled all to enter the kingdom of God through him, for by his blood, his blood shed on the cross he created a new covenant, a covenant available to all people.

Through Jesus Christ, God has invested in all of us the greatest gift imaginable. God has invested in us God's very self through Jesus. Jesus frees us to use our God given potential in the sure knowledge that what we nurture and develop and grow for the glory of God's kingdom may only ever be small compared to what God has invested in us but by doing so we bring joy to our Lord & an increasing relationship of responsibility and love.

And that is good news!