

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

www.stmagnus.org

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

SUNDAY 15th November

You can find our Sunday worship here.

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or on YouTube here.

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Opening meditation

We light this candle to celebrate
the inherent worth and dignity of every person
and to share that love which is ultimately
beyond even our cherished reason,
that love which unites us.

In bright sunlight, warm air, and still evenings,
seasons of colour and courage
God is in our midst.

In hills outlined against the rising sun,
and the muted sounds of early morning walkers along the beach
God is in our midst.

In the faces of families, and those alone,
the hurrying and the day dreaming
God is in our midst.

In life touching other life, moments of kindness,
sharing of joys, caring for others
God is in our midst.

Reading Matthew 25:14-28 (*NRSV*) read by *Helen Cunningham*

Jesus spoke this parable to the disciples:
'It 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 the truth made known in texts for the wisdom found
on different paths for the hope that leads us on
We give thanks.**

Reflection

The story commonly named 'The parable of the talents'
is one of those stories that has left its mark
on our language and culture in a big way.

Indeed, so much has it become part of our everyday vocabulary
that we tend to miss the sting hidden in its tail.
And that's a pity.

How can we connect with this story, this parable?
Some scholars suggest we can connect through the story's ecclesiastical
context.

And Matthew's context is one of the great church debates of his, and our, day.
Should we stay as we are?

Or should we change - become more of an inclusive community
and let 'the others', the Gentiles, people who are different - in?

Matthew's church is probably remembering the controversy over the expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world and the refusal of some Jews to accept that the doors should be flung open so recklessly... God is misbehaving again and they cannot believe it and refuse to support the adventure.

The so-called 'sting' in the tail of the story is that the tragedy is many people are afraid of losing or endangering God and so seek to protect God from adventures, to resist attempts at radical inclusion that might, they fear, compromise God's purity and holiness. We need to encourage people to stop putting God under the mattress. As we begin to trust allowing God to move through us, our lives change as individuals and our communities have a better chance of change.

We have a great opportunity here as we take our worship online and out of our buildings, to a landscape much wider and a horizon much broader and recipients over whom the church has little control.

Today's story told by Matthew is an invitation for us - as church - to look beyond what we have been in the past.
For we can no longer expect 'church' to be what it once was.

Such interpretations, which have tended to influence much clerical thinking over the years focus on the traveller or the owner - and by analogy, God.

A quiet different interpretation of the story would be had if our focus was on the third servant, and from the perspective of a 1st century peasant person. The most likely person to have been in the audience during its oral telling.

Social commentators all around the place are constantly telling us we live in an era of incredibly fast change.

What worked in building our faith communities, for example,
20 years ago,
10 years ago,
or even only last year,
are more than likely not going to work today.

The landscapes of this country and the world are in rapid transition.

Yet despite all this change, there is one part of our social conditioning which seems not to have changed in any radical sense.

We still tend hear this parable through 'capitalist' ears which views wealth as something that can be increased by hard work or investment.

But in the social world of the parable, both in its original oral telling and in its later written form by the storyteller we call Matthew, it is thought there is only so much wealth.

And an increase to one person takes away from another. From this perspective, the man who expects his money to be increased is the wicked one, who is unfettered in his greed... The third servant, then, is not wicked or incompetent, except in the eyes of those who are greedy acquirers or those who are co-opted by them, as are the first two servants. The third servant is the one who acted honourably by blowing the whistle on the wickedness of the owner..

The parable is a warning to the rich to stop exploiting the poor and is one that encourages poor people to take measures that expose such greed for the sin that it is.

Parables are stories which turn our world views upside down. But is our world view, the landscapes of the big wide world, or the narrow confines of the church as institution?

Because which world we view can make all the difference to how we live in the present and claim the future.

Will the connection be through the world - church institution?
If so, is the future to be claimed by preserving, holding on, staying the same?

Or is it claimed in freedom of action, acting boldly, changing?
Will the connection be through the world - global and social?
If so, is the future to be claimed through a new interconnectedness of all life, and the sustainability of resources?

Or is it global commercialism, international corporations and third-world debt?

I invite you to ponder some more.

Prayer

We are reminded that all humanity is connected.
We are dependent on one another and on the earth.
So, may we live in love, caring for one another, building up one another in
love and reverence.

May those who are homeless encounter kindnesses on every corner, may they
not only be offered funds, but guidance toward sustenance both edible and
spiritual, may they be safe when they do find a place to rest, and may they be
assured that many are fighting to end the housing crisis, even in the midst of
this health crisis.

In this season of remembrance may lives be remembered for the unique gifts
they were and remain to this world, may those who mourn find some comfort
in those memories, and may all of us view these memories as clear and
continuing calls to recommit to saving as many lives and memories as
possible.

We pray for those whose days are blurring together. May they have patience
with themselves as they remember that, no matter what phases and surges
and moods and fears continue to ebb and flow, this world is still in the midst
of a global pandemic, may they allow themselves more leeway to be
discombobulated, knowing that discombobulation is currently the literal state
of the world, and may they breathe, calmly look at a calendar, remind
themselves where they are and what they have to do, and move slowly into
whatever day it is.

These are the words of our hearts. So may it be.

Blessing

Our faith asks much of us, sometimes it can feel too much. As we go from our
time together know that you are enough. Your presence and faithfulness are a
great witness to God's love.

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his Spirit
this day and always.