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**Proper 28 | Ordinary 33**

**Sunday 19th November 2023**

**Kirsty Mabbott**

**Call to Worship**

We come to worship God, not because we fear God, but because we love God. **We come to worship God not because God demands it, but because we choose to.** Lift your hearts and minds beyond life’s day-to-day to worship our eternal and constant God. Amen.

**Prayer of Invocation**

Loving God

we gather today in deep expectation of encountering you.

We pray that the Spirit moves us to hearing and seeing

so that your Word enters our hearts and minds

and burns within us with your passion

for justice, peace, faith, hop and love for the whole world. Amen.

**Prayers of Adoration & Confession**

Creator God, we marvel at the wonders of your creation!

You have painted the sky with sun rises and sun sets,

you scattered the universe with stars and planets

so that we can be awestruck by your creative force.

You pay attention to each and every living creature,

no matter it’s size or assumed importance, including us.

You call us your children and made us the stewards of your work.

You taught us how to live, and how to move through the world sharing love with others.

We thank you for taking such an interest in our lives,

for carrying us through the difficult days

and walking alongside us through the days of celebration and joy.

We know, God of All Creation,

that we have abused the responsibility of stewardship you have placed on us.

We have treated the world as if it was ours to use and misuse.

We have brought about the destruction of animals and environmental systems,

we have plundered our oceans, rainforests

and raided the earth beneath our feet for coal, gas, oil and wood.

We have exacerbated climate change.

We have bought into fast-fashion, fast-food, and fast-living,

all of which prevents us from loving our neighbours

and hearing the poor, oppressed and marginalised

as they cry out for justice and freedom.

Forgive us for not being the stewards and people that you call us to be.

Unchain us so that we can become the Jesus followers

you have called us to be in the world. Amen.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

Hear the Good News – God has forgiven our sins through Jesus Christ! Alleluia!

Let us receive forgiveness, embrace hope, accept grace and respond in faith and love. Amen.

**Prayer of Illumination**

Loving God, you have called each of us to serve you.

Help us to be open to hearing that call through your Word

and understanding that call through your Spirit

so that we can follow you more closely through our actions and words. Amen

**Readings**

*St Matthew 25:14-30* | *1 Thesalonians 5:1-11* | *Judges 4:1-7* | *Psalm 123* |

or

*Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18* | *Psalm 90:1-8, (9-11), 12*

**All Age Introduction to Theme**

Think about some of the special gifts or talents God gave you. Maybe God has gifted you with a musical talent, or athletic talent. Maybe God gifted you intellectually, or artistically. Some of you are good at dancing and acting. No matter what gifts God gave you, I know God has given each and every one of you at least one special gift or talent.

When God gives you a gift, He expects you to use it. He doesn’t want the gift to go to waste. God wants you to take that gift and use it to show others how great He is. Sometimes we might think God hasn't given us very much talent. We might even be tempted to hide our talent. But when we use our God-given talent to be all that God planned for us to be, He will give us even more!

I am aware that this is a simple understanding of our reading, but it is important as we come towards the end of the liturgical year that we recognise that each day we have the opportunity to use our gifts and talents from God to share the good news of the Gospel and I encourage you to spend time reflecting on the gifts you have been given and how you can best use them to glorify God and spread the Gospel.

You may also find the following links useful:

<https://sundayschool.works/lessons/parable-of-the-talents-lesson-for-kids/>

<https://ministryark.com/lesson/parable-of-the-talents-childrens-lesson-matthew-2514-30/>

<https://sermons4kids.com/yr_a.htm>

**Offertory & Prayer**

When we gather to worship we give – of our time, our talents and also of our treasure. We give in many ways – by listening to another in need, by offering comfort, giving food to the foodbank, supporting local, national or international charities but we also give to the Church. We may give in a panic forgetting there’d be a collection, we may give in a planned way, in our increasingly cashless society we may give through a regular standing order to the church’s bank; we may even be in a church which offers the opportunity to give using contactless payment. However we give, we give joyfully, knowing that our giving reflects our discipleship. Let us pray:

*Andy Braunston*

God, whose giving knows no ending,

we offer up the treasure that you have entrusted to us;

we offer up the skills and time that you have graciously given to us;

we offer up ourselves in service and praise.

Receive these gifts by your grace.

Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit

to accomplish Christ’s work of love in the world. Amen.

*Joanna Harader, posted on the Spacious Faith blog*

**Sermon Notes**

*Matthew 25:14-30*

The parable of the talents is well known, but sometimes not always deeply excavated. In the sermon I am encouraging folk to use the gifts and talents that God has given them, but that is not the only way to look at the reading. Another way of looking at the reading is to consider if Jesus is the master in this parable, then rather than ordering us to a new life, Jesus is inviting us into an abundant living, and to bury that, only buries ourselves and prevents us from truly living life in it’s fullness. A third way of looking at the gospel reading is that Jesus is not the master, because the master represents the unjust elite and the slave who buried the money he was given did so out of protest. He would not be used to make more profit for someone who already had much more than most. This slave is then ostracized for not accepting the unjust system where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The third slave is more like Jesus in this interpretation.

*1 Thesalonians 5:1-11*

Paul is encouraging the church in Thessalonica to keep aware for the signs of Jesus’ return. He tells them to stay sober and be children of light and to wear the armour of faith. This passage comes at the end of the liturgical year in 2023. We often don’t take the “keep awake” messages seriously in Scripture because the urgency with which we await Jesus’ return is not as it was for the disciples and early church, but this means we sometimes become blasé about when Jesus will return and think “oh it won’t be in our lifetime, we have time to fix that mistake/broken relationship etc”. Which means we sometimes sit with sin for longer than we should. Paul urges us to get right and stay right with each other and with God.

*Judges 4:1-7*

Deborah is amazing! She is the only female judge of the Hebrew people and one of only a small number of female prophets in the Old Testament (along with Miriam, Huldah and the wife of Isaiah). Deborah as a judge would hear the disputes of the Hebrew people and would decide the outcome of them, but she was also a military leader as we see in this passage. The Israelites have been enslaved to Jabin for 20 years and have cried out to God and in response God has spoken to Deborah. Deborah instructs Barak and assures him that she will only bring the Canaanites at the right time. This reading like the psalm demonstrates God’s mercy and power to bring the Israelites out of oppression and to their own autonomy again. God always shows mercy for God’s people.

*Psalm 123*

This psalm may be short, but it is very powerful. Verses 1 & 2 exalt God and show the trust the community have in God. All eyes turn to God like that of a slave to their owner. The people are looking to God for mercy against their enemies and hardships. This psalm is situated after the exile and therefore the tone is one that is hoping for ease from oppression and longing for freedom and independence.

OR *Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18*

The reading begins with “BE SILENT”, this is to get your attention and realise that what is being said matters. We then hear what will happen on “the day of the Lord”. The imagery that follows is very much like the imagery in the New Testament when we hear about the end of time and the second coming of Jesus. Not everyone in Israel is going to be happy, and nothing that you own will be able to buy your way into God’s favour. We only hear about those who have not trusted in God in this passage, possibly because the message to the Hebrew people was that not enough of them were trusting in God and God’s power at this time.

*Psalm 90:1-8, (9-11), 12*

This psalm begins with praising God for being the dwelling-place of the Hebrew people for generations. The first eight verses move from praise for God to acknowledging that time passes and that people are not everlasting, onto recognising that they are sinful and God has righteous anger towards them. The psalmist then acknowledges that human lives are short and that they pass so quickly, and that the people need to make time to recognise God’s anger against them and do something about it, and through all this become blessed with the gift of wisdom from God.

**Intercessions**

Loving God, you have called us to be in the world, to share the joys and sorrows of others and to work and pray for the world. We come before you now praying for the world.

We pray for areas of the world where there is conflict, for the people involved and the innocents who become victims and cannon fodder. We ask that the driving forces behind these conflicts; greed, power, control and oppression of “the other” end and that your peace and reconciliation come over those areas. Bring your healing and wholeness to all of those who have been affected by conflict.

*pause*

We pray for refugees and migrants who have been forced to flee their homelands due to oppression and safety concerns. Lead them to new homes and help us to welcome and embrace them, giving them the fresh start they need to heal and build new lives.

*pause*

We pray for the sick, that the medical staff around them are able to use their skills to help heal them. We bring before you those who cannot be healed, we ask that you bring them and their loved ones to a wider wholeness and bring them comfort and peace. We pray for those who have lost friends and family, hold them in their time of grief and loss, and surround them with people who can ease their sadness.

*pause*

We pray for those who are lost and confused, those who are struggling to find purpose in their life. Place people and experiences in their lives to help them move towards their purpose, giving them more abundant lives.

*pause*

We pray for those who are activists, community advocates and creators of social change and transformation, fill them with passion, tempered with awareness and self-care so that they do not burn out or become despondent to the uphill journey.

*pause*

We pray for those in leadership, in the Church, from elders and ministers to general secretaries and archbishops, and in society, from local councillors to heads of state. Bless them with wisdom, courage, and a sense of duty to those whom they work on behalf of. Help them be the examples of true servanthood that our world needs now and not to put their own interests ahead of those they represent.

*pause*

We ask all of these things in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray: Our Father

**Blessing & Dismissal**

Go now, back into the world,

to walk with Jesus day-by-day,

sharing the good news of the Gospel.

And may God’s Spirit fill you and change you.

May you burn with a fire to be part of God’s Kin-dom building.

And may the blessing of God;

Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer

be upon you today and always. Amen.

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| **Hymn Suggestions** | | | | |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Take my life and let it be | 371 | 502 | 566 | 624 |
| O God of Bethel | 71 | 268 | 475 | 907 |
| Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ | 453 | 673 |  |  |
| O Bread to Pilgrims Given | 456 |  |  |  |
| Take this moment sign and space |  | 501 | 513 |  |
| All I Once Held Dear |  |  | 489 | 799 |
| Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing | 360 |  | 494 |  |
| I bind unto myself today | 36 | 639 |  |  |
| Eternal God Your Love’s Tremendous Glory | 33 |  | 3 | 822 |
| Be thou my vision | 489 | 465 | 545 | 51 |

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*