

Home Worship for March 2019 – Revd Becky Jarratt

3rd March

“Well done, good and faithful servant!”

Read Matthew 25:14-30

What are you good at? Some of our “talents” are fairly obvious. Some of us are good at gardening; others are skilled musicians. We may be able to bake the perfect Victoria sponge, or to park a car in a very small space. It is often easier for others to say what we are good at than for us to recognise it ourselves.

In the Parable of the Talents, the master asked three servants to look after his money while he was away. They were all given different amounts, “each according to his ability” (v 15). When he returned home, he was not disappointed that the servant he had given two talents to had only made two more, whereas the servant who had received five now had ten. We are all gifted in different ways, and the Lord is happy as long as we use our talents in his work. We do not need to be “better” at our endeavours than other people – we just need to be prepared to work with him for the benefit of others.

What other talents may we have inside, hiding away? Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do I do that comes easily and naturally to me?
2. What makes my heart sing?
3. What have you been thanked for?

It may be something as simple as making time to talk to a neighbour. Or getting some shopping for someone who is housebound. Remembering that we have been given one mouth and two ears - listening carefully to someone who is burdened can be a true gift. Over the next week, keep those questions in mind, and reflect to see if an unanticipated gift comes to the fore.

Prayer *Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the gifts you bless us with. Grant us the wisdom to appreciate them, and to use them for the benefit of others. Amen.*

10th March

“This is my command: Love each other.”

Read John 15:1-17

We are coming to the season of new life. If they are not visible already, we shall soon be seeing growth in the trees and bushes, and shortly flowers will be poking their heads up through the ground. This time last year, there was plenty of snow, slowing the pace of spring. I wonder what is in store for us this March?

Jesus shows us a vivid picture in his story of the vine and the branches. If we follow the Lord, we will bear much fruit. If we separate ourselves from the vine, we will wither and die. I am intrigued by verse 2: “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful.”

Have you been able to answer the questions from last week? Is there something within that has surprised you? I would like to suggest that our gifts and talents produce the fruit that Jesus speaks of in this passage. I feel he is telling us that we need to

make use of our gifts, or they will not bear fruit. Even the skills we make good use of can be honed ('cleaned') to be even more productive.

We can read in Apocalypse Explained:

[Everything in heaven, the world, and in the human body] both great and small, was created from use, in use, and for use. A part, in which this ultimate - being for use - ceases, is separated as harmful and is, as it were, condemned and cast out. (AE1194:2)

If we think back to the Parable of the Talents, the master was furious with the servant who hid the money that had been entrusted to him. The servant could have made his master some money by gaining interest from a bank, but instead his fear of his master led to him doing nothing.

Are we sometimes afraid to use our gifts? Are we concerned about what others will think of us? Jesus commands us to love one another. He wants us to show our love through the fruit that we bear: through our gifts.

Prayer *Lord, teach us how to love others as you have loved us. Show us how to grow and develop through a life of use. Amen.*

17th March

“Love your neighbour as yourself.”

Read Matthew 22:34-40

Over the past couple of weeks we have been thinking about putting our gifts to good use. After all, if we don't use our gifts, we might as well not have them. After a while we may forget to use them entirely. There is a balance to be struck, though. Sometimes we can be so caught up in helping others that we forget to look after those closest to us.

It can be rewarding, helping others and empowering them to help themselves. Imagine the volunteer in a centre for the homeless. They come in, day after day, and help to prepare food for those who really need it. They offer their time to listen to people, and feel like they are doing something worthy. However, by spending this much time out of the home, things begin to slip. The volunteer needs to be out early enough to prepare breakfast, leaving their other half to look after the family two or three times a week. Yes, the volunteer is doing something truly beneficial for the homeless, but is neglecting the needs of their family by doing so.

We are also required to look after ourselves, too. The Lord asks us to “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (v. 39). If we spend all of our time on others, without allowing time for rest and recuperation ourselves, we are no good to anyone. If we permanently put the needs of others before our own, we will burn out.

We can read in Heaven and Hell:

...Good and useful activities include providing the necessities of life for oneself and one's own, wanting ample resources for the sake of one's country and one's neighbour, whom a rich person can benefit in far more ways than a poor person can. [These activities are useful also] because they lead the mind away from an idle life, which is destructive, since in that kind of life our thoughts turn to evil because of our inborn evil nature. (HH 361)

Prayer *Heavenly Father, help me to find balance in my life. Help me to use your gifts wisely. Remind me that looking after myself and my family is as important as*

taking care of people I don't know. Teach me how to prioritise, and guide me in my dealings with others. Amen

24th March

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor”

Read Psalm 112

When thinking about our gifts, we sometimes reflect on our weaknesses. When asked, many of us would find it easier to think of something we don't do well, rather than coming up with our talents. We can spend our whole earthly lives trying to conquer a negative quality that we have within, only to see it rear its head again when we least expect it.

I would like us all to think of one negative quality that we are aware of within ourselves. It could be one we are working on at the moment, or one that we have kept tucked away to be dealt with at a later date. Spend a few moments reflecting on this quality. When have we been aware of it in our lives? How have we managed to see it for what it is? When has it been so strong we have struggled to keep it under control?

For some people, the awareness of a negative quality can be all-consuming. I would like us to consider what we can do to use these qualities productively. For example, we may chastise ourselves for feeling we cannot speak up when it is required of us. However, being quiet or shy can give us the opportunity to observe what is going on around us, rather than jumping in straight away with what might not be the best response.

Many people find it hard to know when to say no. Last week, we thought about how it is important to look after ourselves and our families. If selfishness is a quality we are aware of at times, we could put this to good use by being prepared to tell people when too much is being asked of us.

Below is a list of suggestions of how we can turn some negative qualities around. Thinking about the quality you reflected on earlier, how can you use it productively?

| Quality | How we can use it productively |
|---------------------------------|--|
| • Competitiveness | Refusing to fail when challenged |
| • Shyness or quietness | Ability to be reflective and observant |
| • Highly-tuned sense of justice | Being prepared to fight for justice for others |
| • Stubbornness | Not giving up when things get hard |
| • Fear to try new things | Not taking unnecessary risks |

We read in AC 10331:6:

It is a general rule that as is a person's character, so is every work he performs. For this reason 'the works' according to which there will be reward or retribution must be taken to mean a person's character so far as his love and faith are concerned. For works are the product of the

love and faith residing in a person. Nothing other than his love and his faith constitute the person, or what amounts to the same thing, his good and his truth...

Prayer *Heavenly Father, we offer our negative qualities up to you for your use. Teach us how to embrace areas that we would prefer to be hidden, and to use them in love for you and for our neighbours. Amen.* **The Lord's Prayer.**

31st March **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

Read Matthew 6:19-34

It can sometimes be a challenge for us to be happy for others when we feel they have more than we do. Some people use the expression, “They have been dealt a better hand”. I don't believe the Lord “deals” us hands. True enough – we are all born into different circumstances, and it may feel that others have much more than we do. We can look at it in another way. If we are able to receive and read this document, we are luckier than many in the world who do not have access to education or to the Lord's Word.

There are areas in all of our lives where we can observe that others seem to have “more”. It may be that we have not found a partner for life. We may not have been able to have children. Others may have their families living around the corner, and they spend time at weekends with them, whereas ours live a train or plane journey away. We may not have had the promotion at work we feel we deserved. Another's exam results may be better than ours, even though we worked harder.

Being able to be happy for others is important. We may feel their gifts are somehow “better” than ours, or that we haven't been able to achieve as much as others with our talents. As long as we have put what we can into what we are doing, the Lord is happy with us. In the passage in Matthew 6, we are told not to worry. We can only do our best. It is what is in our hearts that is important.

In True Christian Religion, we read: To those who faithfully perform uses, the Lord gives the love of use and its reward, which is internal blessedness, and this is eternal happiness (TCR 736:3). The Lord knows our gifts and talents. All he asks is that we use these in our daily lives in love for him and for those around us. Even if we feel that others have been blessed with greater talents than us, it does not stop us using ours to the best of our ability.

Prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, allow us to be humble in our deeds and dealings with others. Help us to acknowledge our feelings when we feel others have been blessed with more than us. Let us recognise that our own gifts have value and use. Amen.*

Blessing. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.