

Morning Worship for Sunday 15
November
from the United Reformed Church at
Morpeth, Widdrington and Gt.
Bavington.

Welcome

Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:
*Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

*For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light:
Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:
*Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of human love
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild:
*Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For each perfect gift of thine,
to our race so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:
*Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For thy people, evermore
lifting holy hands above,
offering up on every shore
their pure sacrifice of love:
*Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

F. Pierpoint

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Prayer of Praise and Confession

Praise to you Lord, for you are a giving God:

You give us a wonderful world in which to
live.....

You give us each other to love and care for...

You give us a community of faith to share times
of happiness.

You give us a community of faith to hold us up
when life is hard.

You give us tasks to do, people to love, challenges
to learn from.

You give us the greatest gift of all - Jesus Christ to
be our friend and our saviour.

You give us the Holy Spirit to strengthen us for
service to which we called.

Send down your Spirit to guard us and guide us
now and always

Praise to you Lord, the ever - giving God.

But we are sorry Lord, that though you are a
generous God, we have often been ungrateful for
your many gifts. We have squandered the riches
of your creation: we have ignored the cries of the
poor for justice. We have been unkind to those
we love. We have been hateful to those whose
opinions differ from ours. We have envied the
rich neighbour: we have blamed those with little
for their own misfortunes.

In all these ways we have broken your law of
unfailing love and compassion. Yet you are a
generous God whose mercy is endless and you
forgive those who are truly sorry for their sins
and shortcomings.. We are truly sorry.

By the power of your Holy Spirit, strengthen us to
live in your world as those who truly follow Jesus,
in whose name we pray.

The Lord's Prayer.

Reading: Romans 12:3-13

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Sermon

Britain's Got Talent launched one or two people's pop careers.

One programme not forget in a hurry. Simon Cowell and judges. Up steps a slightly gauche looking diminutive woman, not the usual contestant seeking their 15 minutes of fame (Andy Warhol). Cowell and co looked at each other. Glances were exchanged between the judges.....

Then the woman opened her mouth and sang..... The audience gasped and then started clapping. On their feet, the judges too, applauding and cheering. Susan Boyle, an unknown from Scotland was launched into her career with the most surprising of gifts - the ability to sing with a rich voice, sing from the heart. And sing she did - "I dreamed a dream" from Les Miserables.

She would say singing was her life - it meant everything.

It also demonstrated that everyone has gifts and talents they can use.

The Parable of the Talents in Matthew's gospel neatly bridges between the word "**talent**" which we use in modern day (according to Oxford English Dictionary) to describe a personal attribute or gift and the Greek and Roman use of "**talent**" as a word for an item of currency. The modern almost certainly derives from the ancient. So it is fair to see them as having a similar meaning.

This parable is set as a sort of filling sandwiched between the parable of the wise and foolish virgins and the sheep and the goats. All three are to be seen in the context of teaching about the Kingdom of heaven. What the signs will be of its coming and what disciples must do to prepare for it.

In this parable I have to say that I have a sense of sympathy for the one talent servant. I am risk averse-in the jargon of financial advisers. The one

talent servant is like that. He is fearful of the future in a time of what we today might call 'market volatility.' He is no banker and, probably judges that it is not a good time to take risks. Being timid he goes and buries the talent.

Perhaps I am reading too much into the characters in this narrative. Too much attention to the details of a parable can make us miss the point of the story. New Testament expositors from middle 20th Century remind us there is usually one main point to be gleaned from any of Jesus' parables. The rest is largely the result of the story-teller's craft. The rabbi's teaching gift of embellishment or dramatic effect.

So, the point. All have been given gifts and talents to be used in the service of the King and the Kingdom and we should use them to the best of our ability. If we commit to this with determination, God will add to the blessings we receive. To squander those gifts, whatever they are, is to waste the precious opportunity that may come to witness to the world, to speak of God's love and to act to make the kingdom's coming sooner.

BUT we may argue - 'I don't have any gift to offer. I can't sing. I am too young. Or I am too old. And I am certainly a not financial whizzkid with the ability to make a fortune.

Yet....

We may not have the voice of Susan Boyle - but we can in our worship sing out with joy in our heart.

Too young? In the letters to Timothy Paul encourages him to lead the church by example and in the strength of the Holy Spirit and not to allow anyone to despise his youth.

Too old? Remember the story of Abraham and Sarah who in the stories of the OT took on the task of founding a great nation at a great age and when Sarah way past childbearing. Nobody is too old to have gifts to share. We may not be in the prime of life, we may be feeling the burden of the years but we can at least offer to God our slowness as an opportunity for meditation and prayer for the world in all its need and turmoil.

Not financial guru – but we can make use of what money we have and use it wisely and well to support charity, to uphold the church and pay joyfully (!) our social obligations in taxes

And, the parable of the Talents suggests that we should be prepared to take a risk to see the kingdom come in our day and age. No good burying what abilities we do have in the hope that all will still be as it was when the time comes to reconcile our accounts. Times move on, human life changes rapidly. Circumstances change in a snap of the fingers. Who could have imagined the pandemic this time last year? Parable suggests that through all the sadness at the loss of life and the courage of the medicos, through the dramatic changes to the way of life of society and in the church in this age, some new things will emerge which we cannot yet imagine. Through our gifts and talents maybe the Holy Spirit is leading us into new challenges that will test our faith but bring new blessings. 'For to those who have, still more will be given.'

Hymn: O Thou who camest from above,

O Thou who camest from above,
the pure celestial fire to impart
kindle a flame of sacred love
upon the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work and speak and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me.

Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make my sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Intercession

We come now to our prayers for others
At the end of each short offering of prayer there will be a pause for silent reflection..

Let us pray:-

'Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep'.

We ask God to help us share in the blessings and the heartaches of life.

In this time of uncertainty and fear let us pray for all those dramatically affected by covid 19. Let us pray for those who have been taken ill and are struggling for life and recovery. Let us pray for those who risk their lives in seeking to help and heal the sick. Let us pray for children and young people whose lives and futures are being affected, for schools, universities and teaching staff. Let us pray for all who are mourning the loss of someone they love. Let us pray that through the darkness of these times light and hope and peace may come.

Despite the darkness, light does shine and we thank God for those joyful occasions which take away some of the sadness and bleakness of our living today. We pray for those newly born, for their celebrating parents and grandparents that they may grow together in strength of family and in loving commitment to each other.

We pray for those celebrating positive life changes – retirement, a new job, special birthdays. As we do so we hold before God those who have lost their jobs and their livelihoods because of coronavirus.

Especially at this time we pray for the United States of America, with whom we have many ties of friendship and family. We pray for the unity of purpose and the healing of divisions.

We pray for the church in the face of so many changes in our lives.. May we be given a new vision of what God can do through the challenges of today. We pray for our common life in this community and for the role of churches in bringing people together.

And we pray for those who are aged or sick or lonely and pray that we may be a comfort and a strength to each one.

'Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep'

In the Name of Jesus

Amen

Hymn: Let us build a house where love can dwell

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
All are welcome...

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:
All are welcome...

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:
All are welcome...

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
All are welcome...

Marty Haugen  1994 GIA Publications Inc
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Blessing