

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 15 November 2020

God, source of all light, by your Word give light to our lives. Amen

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

Use all!

The traditional reading this parable encourages disciples to use their resources – ‘talents’(Greek: *Talaton*) well – talents like singing, entrepreneurship, or public speaking and so forth. But what Jesus tells them through this parable is to use their talents all. It challenges them to emulate their master by using ‘ALL.’ We hear this parable from Jesus who indeed used all his talents – that was his life as a whole until the death of the cross. To use the entrusted talents ‘all’ that they had, they had to trust their master first. Trust in their master had enabled them to be very faithful to do their work till the master came back. So the parable helps us reevaluate our faith from all dimension.

In the parable, trust is one of the important elements between the master and the servants. The master trusted his servants enough to entrust them with a staggering amount of money. Trust in their master is also crucial for the servants during the master’s prolonged absence. As we heard, the first receives five times as much as the last. But, each receives a significant sum of money. A talent is equal to about 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius is a common labourer’s daily wage, a talent would be roughly equivalent to 20 years wages for the average worker. Five talents, the largest amount entrusted to any of the servants, is comparable to one hundred years-worth of labour. At first glance, the third servant who hid his master’s money in the ground seems more prudent than the others. He did exactly what other people would do to keep valuable things at that time. He also knew what his master was like. The master was a harsh man, reaping where he didn’t sow, and gathering where he did not scatter seed. Indeed, the master was not an ordinary person, and from the perspective of the third servant, he must have been a very fearful figure. Yet when it comes to the other two, the master didn’t seem to be received as the third did. They may also have known what their master was like. But in their cases, the master’s character helped them carry on the work entrusted to them. His harsh nature didn’t seem to prevent the two servants from using all the talents. They may have believed that the master would know what would happen to the money. The two servants just followed the master’s instruction as they trusted in his judgement. When the master returned home finally, he punished the third harshly while praising the other two with their good work. So the focus is not on keeping the same money as it is. It is rather about trust in their master and using all the talent entrusted without being afraid of losing it. Trust in their master also enables the two servants to be faithful in continuing the work during his prolonged absence. In doing so, they didn’t depend on their judgement and abilities, but their master’s as if they were with him. It explains why they didn’t seem to be afraid of losing the talents. The trust they had in their master allowed them to continue without any doubts as it was what the master wanted them to do.

Jesus tells this story to his disciples to prepare them for the days ahead when their faith will be tested. The parable shows how the disciples are to demonstrate their

trust in their Lord and to be faithful as they anticipate the return of the Lord. For them, doing the same work that the master has been doing is a way of emulating the master. Jesus didn't hesitate to entrust his salvific work to them including the proclaiming the arrival of God's kingdom by feeding the hungry, curing the sick, blessing the meek, and serving the least.

At this stage, we cannot help but ask with what talents we have been entrusted. In our storytime, we watched a short video clip about Nick Vujicic – the Australian evangelist with no arms and legs. The question was 'What is Nic's talent, and to what extent is he using it?' As seen, he was born¹ without arms and legs. Nic became one of the first physically disabled students integrated into a mainstream school once laws changed. However, his lack of limbs made him a target for school bullies, and he fell into a severe depression. At age eight, he contemplated suicide and even tried to drown himself in his bathtub at age ten; his love for his parents prevented him from following through.

Nick prayed very hard that God would give him arms and legs, and initially told God that, if his prayer remained unanswered, he would not praise him indefinitely. However, a key turning point in his faith came when his mother showed him a newspaper article about a man dealing with a severe disability. Vujicic realized he wasn't unique in his struggles and began to embrace his lack of limbs. After this, Nick realized his accomplishments could inspire others and became grateful for his life. When he was seventeen, he started to give talks at his prayer group, and later founded his non-profit organization, Life Without Limbs. He is now an evangelist who inspires people with hope and the love of God through the gospel. Similar to the two slaves in the parable, he trusts in God, and he is using his talent fully for the kingdom of God.

Nic and the two servants in the parable share a few common things. They trust in God, and they are not afraid of using all their talents – their lives as a whole that was entrusted to them. They are faithful too. They do not count how many days have passed since the master left and how many more days, they have to wait for their mater till he comes back. If so, what is our work in which we invest all our talents?

All who would follow Jesus are to preach the good news of the kingdom to the whole world² by doing about the work that the master has called them to do.³ In God's kingdom, the blind see, the lame walk, and the hungry be filled⁴ not only physically but spiritually through the good news of Jesus Christ. Indeed, our faith in God not only enables us to be prepared, to keep awake, but it also enables us to use all that we are entrusted with for God's kingdom. The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.⁵ Those who are found faithful and trust their master may hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master." Amen.

¹ Nick Vujicic was born to Dushka and Boris Vujicic in 1982 in Melbourne, Australia

² Matthew 24:14

³ Matthew 24:24-51

⁴ Matthew 25:31-46

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:2