



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'SUSPENDED CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 15th November 2020



NEWS UPDATE

Sticker Advent Calendar by 'God Venture'



Eleven of these have been ordered since last week, which means that I have nine remaining. Do let me know if you would like one, for yourself or a friend / family member.



St Christopher's Finances

In the next week or so there will be a separate communication about our finances. 2020 has been a difficult year for us, and we are not in a good position.

I will first spend a bit more time analysing our income and expenditure – with help from Malcolm, Hilary, and Debra – before putting something together that explains things clearly.

T-2Gether – Do you remember when...?



As restrictions continue, and Christmas is approaching, we may become increasingly aware



of some activities that we miss. The T-2Gether has always been popular, and it has now been eight months since it last met.

Unfortunately, it does not look likely that the T-2Gether will be able to meet again any time soon. Janet Dixon and other members of the team have been dedicated to keeping in touch with the regulars, who no doubt have missed it very much. In the words of Vera Lynn, *we'll meet again don't know where, don't know when*

**WE'LL MEET AGAIN
DON'T KNOW
WHERE,
DON'T KNOW WHEN,
BUT I KNOW WE'LL
MEET AGAIN SOME
SUNNY DAY.**

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE



This week's message comes from Jim Cam and is a reflection on Jesus' *Parable of the Talents*.

Bible Reading – Matthew 25:14-30 – The Parable of the Talents

'For 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 to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Is life one big Talent Show?



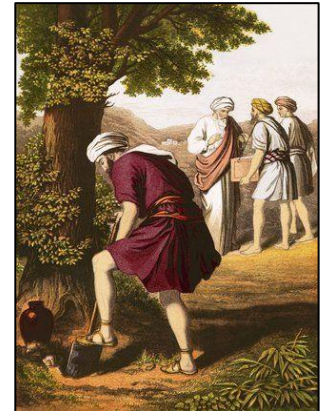
Talent shows on TV have always been popular viewing and today they are as popular as ever.

I'll be really showing my age when I say that as a kid, back in the days of black and white TV, we used to watch Opportunity Knocks with Hughie Green. By comparison today's shows are high tech, slick, glitzy, polished affairs. Dance and/or

singing talent seem to be particular favourites at the moment. The latest, which had its final last week, involved singing and dancing groups vying for a place to tour as a supporting act with the all-girl band 'Little Mix'.

You really feel for the contestants who put their heart and soul into what they do as they seek to win the vote from the judges. Such contests are, by nature, competitive and at the end there can be only one winner. For the winners the prize is to receive a commercial contract from the judges that opens up new opportunities to further grow and develop their talent and go on to even bigger and greater things.

In our reading we heard Jesus telling the Parable of The Talents. Here we heard of two wise servants and one foolish one who were left to use their varying amount of talents of money for the benefit of their Master whilst he was away. When the moment came for the Master's return to see how they had done, the two wise servants were commended for using what they had been given, in accordance with their individual ability, to good effect. The unwise servant on the other hand hadn't even attempted to use the smaller amount he'd been given. Instead he'd just buried it in the ground.



It needs to be pointed out here that the word 'talent' in biblical times was a measure of weight for weighing out coinage, either in copper, silver or gold. According to Bishop Tom Wright's commentary a talent of silver is estimated to have been worth about 15 years of a labourer's wages. Our understanding of the word today is a little different. We think of having a 'talent' as being linked to a skill, ability or gift that a person has; yet either way it is something to be highly valued.

Now, what on earth has this to do with us, in today's often competitive world of winners and losers in life's talent shows? Like every parable of Jesus, the story is a spiritual metaphor. Does it mean that Christians should view the living out of their faith as like being in some sort of 'Faith and Talent' contest?

Should we be worried about the judge's verdict?

There is the Christian hope of a future to look forward to that we can barely begin to imagine. We believe Jesus one day shall return to gather his own to be with him for ever in God's kingdom, and when we do meet him we will want to be able to say we have at least attempted to make good use of whatever we have known of his love and will in our lives.

So if Jesus, as our Lord and Master, returned tomorrow to take stock on what we had done with our lives – to see to what extent we had sought to apply what we had come to know of God's grace and mercy revealed in Jesus – would he be pleased? Would he find that we had sought to use whatever God-given abilities we found that we had to good effect? Would he be able to say to us, "Well done good and faithful servant?"

There can be a danger of regarding Christianity as if God has set up a *heavenly examination system*, where He has produced a syllabus for us to study, things to learn and do, rules to keep, and one day he'll come and set a final exam to see who passes or fails. This parable at first sight might appear to reinforce this impression, and this could make us feel somewhat unsettled. We may be all too well aware of our personal failings.



But set against the whole of Jesus' life and teaching, we know that God is not like this. Jesus himself declared that he came to call sinners, not the self-righteous. He came to seek and save the lost in accordance with the Father's will. The good news of the Gospel is that we are saved by God's unmerited grace and favour, not by us competing to live a good enough life that scores enough points to pass the test and get us into heaven.



Rather, we are to trust in Christ that on the cross he has dealt with all that would produce a shortfall in our score in living a good enough life; and amazingly, at the cross we get to exchange our mediocre exam mark for his perfect score sheet!

So for those who

have trusted in Jesus' atoning sacrifice for their sins, God and St Peter will not be ringing their buzzers at heaven's gate to say whether or not we are through to the next round. We don't need to be worried about the judge's verdict if we have put our faith and trust in Jesus.



The Measure of our Response

Having been saved by what Christ has done for us, we are now called to live and use our God given talents, not to score enough points to pass God's salvation test, but as an ongoing response of gratitude in the light of His generous love shown to us on the cross. It's our response to Jesus that matters – and it does really matter.

There is a warning for those who would seem to be indifferent, or unmoved by all that Jesus has done for them. To choose to do nothing in response to God's amazing grace would be showing contempt for all that Jesus suffered and endured on the cross for us. Ignoring the love we have been shown, and overlooking everything that God has blessed us with, would only demonstrate that the cross of Jesus has not really affected us. Things did not end well for the 'worthless slave' who buried his talent in the ground. By contrast, if we respond with gratitude, and give back to God (and others) the love we have been shown, then we will be numbered among those who are commended.

In the parable Jesus's hearers would have recognised that Jesus was really talking about God and Israel, with the unwise servant representing the scribes and Pharisees. They had been given the Law of Moses, and the Temple as God's presence among them. They were the privileged ones. They had received the promises of God through the prophets, about how God would bless not only Israel but the whole world through them. Alas, they had turned the command to be the light of the world into keeping the light exclusively for themselves. They had buried the promises of God under a pile of rules and were rejecting Jesus who was both the fulfilment of the Law and The Light of the world.

The two commended servants are those who hear the call of Jesus and, in the light of Christ, go on to play their part in developing and using what they have received through him to fulfil what God originally intended.

Returning to the theme of talents, what speaks to you today? This motivational slide might help.

Each of the servants were given an amount of talents "in accordance with their ability."

Likewise, each of us has some talent in some measure in which to live our life. Some may have



a more generous allocation, others less so. God in his wisdom gives each of us some measure in our personality, gifts, wealth, and abilities to develop and use them for good and to his praise and glory.

Don't fall for the lie that you are not good enough, or that there's nothing you could possibly do that in some way might serve to express God's love, grace and mercy in the world. This is a lie of the devil! It's not the amount of talent you may feel you have that matters, but what you do with what you do have.

As we come to know Christ and God's amazing, gracious love for us, each of us has an opportunity to grow in our knowledge and appreciation of these things. Then we can seek to express that love in our lives through our God given talents, gifts, personalities. Each of the servants received some measure of talent to serve the master in accordance with their varying abilities.

Nobody has nothing, everybody has something. We all have some part to play in serving Jesus and seeking to honour him in our lives. It's not just limited to those standing up front or in some other visible, public role. There is the everyday need for showing generosity, compassion, and mercy, to pray and support those in need, to encourage one another. So find out what your talents and abilities are, then in gratitude offer them back to God for use in his service.

One day we will stand before our Maker. Whenever that may be, may he find that we used what we were given to make the Father's love more visible, more known, and experienced. Then may we too hear his gracious words;

“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.”

Prayers

Lord Jesus, I thank you that my eternal future is secure because of what You have done for me.

Thank you that you died in my place, so that through faith in you my sins are forgiven,
and I am counted as righteous. You did this because you love me so much. Thank you Jesus.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, let my response to your love and goodness be worthy of all that I have received.

Help me to recognise what I have been given, and be ready to offer myself in your service.

Though I may feel weak, show me what strengths I possess,
which can be used in the service of God and others.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Lord, may I also be ready to celebrate the gifts and talents of others. Let me not compare myself to other people, nor seek to compete with them, but instead encourage all to use what they have been given for good.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus, I long to hear those words spoken over me – *“well done, good and faithful servant.”*

If I have grown tired, strengthen me. If I have lost interest in living wholeheartedly for you,
inspire me once again. May your Holy Spirit bring me perseverance and endurance,
that I may remain your faithful soldier and servant to the end of my days.

**Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

