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ORDINARY 33A

19th November 2023

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayer

The God of grace is here to welcome you,
Jesus the Christ is here alongside you,
The Spirit moves by ways we do not know.

Our God comes close, closer than we can imagine.

Come close, Lord Jesus.

God who created the universe,
Christ who walked amongst us and continues to hold the cosmos together,
Spirit who moves, inspires and uplifts us,
I give you the thanks and praise this day.

Come close, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are most comfortable.

Readings: Matthew 25:14-30 – [Click for reading](#)

Hymn:

Listen to and sing along with one or more of these songs:

239 STF – Sent by the Lord am I – [YouTube](#)

545 STF – Be thou my vision - [YouTube](#)

277 STF – My song is love unknown - [YouTube](#)

Response to the reading

What happens if we abandon our traditional interpretation of today's gospel reading and have another go?

The traditional interpretation hinges on one assumption, for which I can see no clear evidence in the passage: that the master / giver of gold is somehow meant to represent God. But is that really true? Jesus never seems to say so. Do we really believe in a God who would give more gold to people who were more talented already, or who would say 'to those who already have, more shall be given... and to those who have little, what little they have will be taken away'. This certainly doesn't seem to match with the image of the Kingdom of God that Jesus paints elsewhere in the gospels.

What if this is not a story about how we should use what we have wisely (an interpretation that is helped by the confusing translation issue that the currency in this story is translated 'talents', the same word as we use for gifts/skills). What if, rather, it's a story about how unfair the world is and how many of us will be cast out by the system if we stand up to greed, or are unwilling to line the pockets of the wealthy with our hard work? Suddenly it becomes quite a different reading.

Here, we see the Master as a sort of archetypal capitalist overlord – someone who has plenty of wealth to spare, but only really wishes to use it to generate more.

Of course, he does rather well out of the whole affair, his investments double in the two larger of the three businesses. But the third appears to function more as a nonprofit, or a social enterprise company. This third investment does not grow. The third businessman appears to operate counter to the system of greed and wealth creation.

Of course, in the capitalist market-economy of the story, the investor is bitterly disappointed. The counter-narrative offered by this third business doesn't help him get any richer, so he throws him out.

But is the Kingdom of God a capitalist market-economy? Is the master an investor?

As we head towards Christmas and Advent, it strikes me every year that the incarnation of God, the birth of Christ, breaks all the assumptions that people have about what that might look like. The Kingdom of God comes near, and hardly anyone even notices...

We are the people of the counter-narrative. The Jesus-stories are about a man who resisted the status quo and built a movement based around love, self-sacrifice, justice and peace. How are we building that counter-narrative today?

Lord, forgive me for the times when my head is turned by the world's agenda, by money and wealth. Show me how to stay focused on your Kingdom. Ponder these two questions in the quiet for a few moments, perhaps taking notes and then find a way to discuss your answers and reflections in the week.

- How does the 'alternative' reading of this famous story from Matthew 25 make you feel? Have you heard it before? Is it helpful, or not really?

- Are there other places or stories in the Bible where there could be an 'alternative sermon' to the traditional messages we draw out? See if you can make a list of 3 or 4 stories and how they could be looked at a different way...

Hymn:

513 STF – Take this moment, sign, and space – [YouTube](#)

You might like to listen to this hymn and sing along, but please note that Twelvebaskets does not own the rights to this video so you need to seek permission from the rights holder before using it in public worship or online.

Blessing

God of grace, Spirit of hope, Christ who transforms us – send me out with your courage, your love, your peace into a community and a world in need.

May I go in peace, and serve the Lord,

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 20th November

- God of love,
Show me something of the mystery of your love for me this day, I pray.
Help me to learn more of you and your designs for me and my life.
Amen.

Tuesday 21st November

- Why not spend some time in silent meditation today?
- You could set an alarm – perhaps for 10-15 minutes, and then finding somewhere comfortable, where you can sit and empty your mind.
If it helps, you could use the Headspace app or website, or a similar service, to help you focus on the meditation and get used to the idea of sitting in silence for a length of time.
- Is this a practice you could include in your daily spiritual life?

Wednesday 22nd November

- If you can, go on a prayer walk. Or ask someone to help you make a journey around your neighbourhood – just the few houses near you would be fine, or go on a longer trip if you'd like to take in a whole estate or community.
- As you travel past each house, pray for the people who live there – just in your mind, or under your breath. Hold their situations, whether you know them or not, in your heart.

Thursday 23rd November

- As you travel through this day, look out for Christmas lights and pray that people might experience something of the light of Christ in their lives this day and over this season.

Friday 24th November

God is everywhere, if only you could be still enough to notice.
Today, your challenge is to notice.
Look for God in the sunrise, the birdsong, the taste of pizza, the comfort of your sofa, the embrace of a loved one, a text message that makes you smile...whatever it is. Notice.

Saturday 25th November

- God my father and God my mother,
God my big sister and God my little brother,
God my best friend and God my Creator,
I open myself up to encounter you again this weekend.
Move in my life, open my eyes and heart,
That I may see your love,
And know your invitation to be a part of your Kingdom.
Amen.