

Second Sunday before Advent – 15 November 2020

Sermon

Do I know you? A question I ask myself as someone comes towards me in the street; since we all started wearing masks it can be tricky. Added to which we are all trying to steer a course away from each other, and so, getting close enough to identify potential friends, and all through steamed up varifocals, it can be a problem. Do I know you?

Of course knowing someone goes far beyond recognising and identifying a person. To really know someone we need time, conversation and interaction. Also tricky these days.

As Christians we have a relationship with our heavenly Father and we pray that we may come to know God more fully day by day.

Today's gospel reading is a very well-known parable – the parable of the talents. I have, in the past disliked this story, as I felt it was so unfair to the poor man who was given one talent and then just kept it safe. That probably speaks more about my personality than a thought through theological position – I am by nature fairly risk averse.

On deeper consideration it appears that this was fairly common practice for business owners to leave a slave in charge – perhaps we would see this person as more of a steward, someone authorised to act on behalf of their boss. In this light I have to conclude that it wasn't unfair to put the man with one talent in this position – he should have been ready for this responsibility.

There is an interesting dynamic between the slaves and master. The master clearly differentiates between the slaves as to his estimate of their capabilities. He is not risking more than he thinks they can work with – he knows the men.

At the end of the exercise the slave who had been given one talent sums up his knowledge of his master:

“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.”

It's a very forthright statement for a slave. I wonder if the slave felt resentful that he hadn't been entrusted with much, perhaps this relationship had been going wrong for some time and he had given up on even trying to please his master and now the resentment pours out.

If he knew he was working for a hard man, should he not try even harder to prove himself? In the end did he really know the master or was he misjudging him, was the master in fact offering him a chance to shine?

When we consider our relationship with God we assert that God knows us more fully and completely than we even know ourselves. How does this work out in our day to day lives in

our response to God. Do we see God's love for us as meek and mild; God on our side? God loves us just as we are.

Or do we believe that God has high expectations of us? The people of God entrusted to multiply and to share God's good news, to live out the kingdom values.

This is a challenge to live adventurously, to go, in the common phrase, outside our comfort zones. The master in Jesus' parable had high expectations of his slaves but he also knew them individually, he wasn't making them compete with each other, he accepted an increase of two talents from one and five talents from another.

Every single person created by God has so much potential and it is part of the brokenness of our world that not everyone gets to live out all that they have to offer. There are so many reasons for this: poverty, racism and prejudice to name but a few. This past week marked the 25th Anniversary of the disability discrimination act and we have to give thanks for what that legislation has done to enable people with disabilities to play their full role in our society whilst acknowledging that there is still much, much more to be done in that respect.

So sometimes our circumstances hold us back from developing our full creativity. But are there also times when we don't take the initiative?

How are we to live adventurously; to step out in faith? This is not a bad time of year to ponder this question. It is nearly Advent. Advent is a new year in the churches calendar and it is also a time of preparation for the coming of Jesus into our lives anew. Are there aspects of our lives which we don't view through the lens of faith? Do we ask God to guide us in what to do in our relationships in our family time, with finances, leisure time, and times of prayer each day? Are there ways in which we could trust God and be more adventurous, try something new?

In the first reading Paul speaks about the expectation that Jesus will return and this will be at an unexpected hour. But for the children of light, he says, it will not be a surprise because we are to be awake, alert and ready, living the life, giving our all.

So be encouraged.

Amen