

## Sermon – Matthew 25.14-30

This morning's gospel is a very familiar story, with its emphasis on using the talents we're given – whether we mean by talents material wealth or skills or opportunities. If we don't use what we're given then it tends to devalue and be of less use. Instead of increasing, our money becomes worth less over time and our unused skills disappear over the years, whereas if we use our gifts, they increase and multiply and gain in strength and value.

However, I want to bring out an extra facet of the parable.

It can seem unfair at the end that the man with only one talent has it taken away, and it is then given to the man who already had ten! Isn't that favouritism? And isn't that just how life seems to work – that some people get all the luck while others have none?

But I don't think luck comes in to it, and I don't think that favouritism has anything to do with why the master gives the extra talent to the first servant who already had ten. I believe that it is a pragmatic, common sense decision, because the master knows that this servant is the one who will be able to use it best. He's already proved that he knows how to use his gifts in his master's service. "Well done, good and faithful servant," his master has said to him. "You have been faithful over a little, now I will set you over much." He's proved his worth, and so his master is confident he can rely on him in the future.

Please notice, however, that he says **exactly** the same words to the second servant, the one who was given two to start with and makes two more. The master invites **both** of them: "Come and enter into the joy of your master." We are praised and rewarded and **trusted** on the basis of our **efforts**, on what we have done with what we were given to start with. We shouldn't measure our service, or our good deeds, or our lives against others, but only against ourselves.

C.S. Lewis said that being "nice" is often not due to virtue, but to inheriting a good digestion or an even temperament from our parents – good nature or a short temper are often largely dictated by our genes. Alternatively, a happy or unhappy childhood often greatly affects the kinds of people we are in later life. God will know how many "talents" (as it were) we started off with and judge us according to what we did with them. And since we don't know everything there is to know about others, we should avoid making judgements on anyone else based on what we see with our limited vision.

Last week was Remembrance Day, when we remembered those who offered all their "talents" in our country's wars and whose rewards they did not live to reap in this world. And this is true of many others – that there seems to be no reward in this life.

But God sees and knows what everyone has ever done, what they have made of what they were given, and he values the faithfulness of their service.

We may sometimes feel very small in comparison with those who seem to have offered so much: we may feel that we have nothing to offer, or can do nothing like them to be of service to God or others. But God sees each of us as an individual and he doesn't expect us to do the impossible. What we must and can do is to use what gifts and opportunities we do have, however small, rather than giving up and wasting them – burying them in the ground.

And God will reward our efforts, rather than measuring their impact, and invite us to enter into his happiness and share his joy.