

The talent of faith

(The Parable of the Talent)

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[READINGS: ZEPHANIAH 1.7, 12-18, PSALM 90. 1-8 [9-11], 12; THESSALONIANS 5.1-11; MATTHEW 25. 14-30]

Let me tell you a story ;

A miser hid his gold at the foot of a tree in his garden. Every week he would dig it up and look at it for hours. One day a thief dug up the gold and made off with it. When the miser next came to gaze upon his treasure, all he found was an empty hole.

The man began to howl with grief so his neighbours came running to find out what the trouble was. When they found out, one of them asked, “Did you use any of the gold?”

“No,” said the miser. “I only looked at it every week.”

“Well, then,” said the neighbour, “for all the good the gold did you, you might as well come every week and gaze upon the hole.” (Anthony De Mello, *The Heart of the Enlightened*, (Fount 1997) 20.

The parable of the talents about which we heard this morning is a parable about God’s gifts to us. Each of us has gifts given by God by which we can make a difference in the world for the better. We can either discover and use the gifts and make a huge difference in life for ourselves and for others or we can just hide away our talent in a hole like the foolish servant. As it is said, “Better to light a candle than curse the darkness”.

The parable of the talents is about “using” the gifts we have received from God. The biggest gift that we have received is the gift of Jesus Christ. “*God so loved the world that He gave his only son so that whoever believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life.*” (John 3.16)

Many of us, most of us, hide away this gift and do not “use” this gift of faith in Jesus Christ. We hide away our gifts in different and strange ways. As we heard in the gospel, “*But the one who received one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.*” (Mt 25. 18)

This is our tragedy as Christians! Like that servant who hid the talent, we hide our talents as Christians. We do not let our faith in God direct and guide our lives but we let the circumstances dictate to us. So we live without a fulcrum, without a centre, without a focus, without a heart. We forget that faith is an adventure to choose God, to choose love, to choose hope.

WHAT DOES CHRIST WANT TO TEACH US THROUGH THIS PARABLE?

1. We are required to be vigilant, ready and active while we await to meet the master.

It is not enough just to wait. *The third servant waited for the master’s return but had nothing to show when he was asked to give and account of what he received.* Inactivity and passivity are close to laziness and apathy. These are not hallmarks of an authentic disciple, believer or Christian.

“*Faith without good works is dead*”, says James in chapter 2.17 of his letter. Whatever good intentions, political correctness that he had, this third servant tragically misread the mind and heart of his master and brought on himself the punishment he never probably expected!

2. Appearances deceive!

Appearances can deceive like the three servants. They all were entrusted with a sum by the master. Apparently everything seemed fine, but *the third servant was inactive, passive and lazy. His heart was cold and without enthusiasm for his master.* Remember Judas Iscariot, “one of the twelve”? He

looked like a disciple but was not! The vital thing is inward and hidden. *The point is : “do we have have Christ” in our hearts and in our lives or is he hidden away just to be used on Sundays and special days?*

3. *Salvation requires a personal faith in a personal saviour.*

We also heard in the second reading of today, “*God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.*” (1 Thess 5. 9-10)

The man who hid his talent in the ground had no faith in his master. There was no relationship at all with his master. In fact, the servant despised his master and had no trust at all in him. “*Love and faith are languages of maximum possibilities, not of minimum obligations*”.

At the end of the day, *Christianity is all about a personal faith in a personal saviour.* It is that deepest relationship with Christ that changes all things, transforms all things, opens new horizons, that radically changes our way of living.

It is that deep relationship with the master that made the two servants trade their talents, work hard and double their talents. Their hearts were fired with that motivation to please their master and be loyal to him and behold, the master totally recognised and wholly rewarded their faithfulness.

4. *Conclusion*

There are many Christians who have hidden away their gift of faith like that third servant. They are not conscious of the love and trust placed on them by the Lord. They have not let their faith grow, develop and reach out and touch others’ lives. Charles Wesley puts it so well: “*One day I woke up and realized that I was baptised, I was confirmed, I was ordained, but not converted!*” (Charles Wesley)

At the end of our lives if the doors are shut against us, the problem could be that we didn’t have faith in our hearts, that we had hidden our talents. “*Wherever God’s gift has already borne fruit, God gives in greater abundance; when it has been fruitless, it is lost completely.*” (Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus : A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans,2000), 277.

As Christians baptised into Christ, we are called to live in intimate relationship with him and this union with Christ empowers us to live lives of integrity like Jesus, in whom words and deeds harmonised in to a powerful witness of the ‘good news’ of salvation, unlike the Scribes and Pharisees whose words and deeds did not measure up and their lives were empty and did not witness to God’s goodness and presence.

May this coming together in fellowship strengthen our bonds with one another and our absolute and total commitment to Jesus Christ, the supreme and sovereign lord and saviour of our lives. May our total surrender to Christ change our lives and that of the world around us. Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, we acknowledge you as our saviour and as our lord. We thank you for ‘being there’ for us always. May we never cease to walk towards you, give our lives to you and follow you, for we know that you alone are the only hope and the only answer to all our problems. Amen.

(ST Mattapally, 2017)