

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE BY THE REVEREND STUART
LANGSHAW ON SUNDAY NOVEMBER 19, 2017**

MATTHEW 25:14-30

Valerie and I get on very well with our next-door neighbours. We look after each other's rubbish bins and pick up the weekend newspapers when we go away and so on. But – there was one holiday when they asked us to look after their goldfish. That puts neighbourliness onto a whole new level. What if the fish died? How much food is enough food? Will the water need changing? I tell you – to be in charge of another person's pets ... even though it's just goldfish ... is a real responsibility. At the end of a week, the fish and I were still alive and looking good.

It's called stewardship. Looking after someone else's resources to the best of our ability.

The Gospel reading for today is the fairly well-known parable Jesus told about the "talents." Let me just say one thing about parables as such before we proceed. Most of Jesus' parables are stories he told to communicate one central message. A mistake we sometimes make is to regard parables as allegories and try to make a meaning for each and every detail of the parable. That leads us into all sorts of difficulty – and especially so with a parable such as this one. One central message. Here is that message from today's parable – ***we are responsible for doing the best we can with the gifts that God has given us.***

The gifts we have are different from the gifts that other people have, but the same as yet other people have. The number of talents some people have seems to be great, while others seem to have fewer talents. No matter. We are responsible for doing the best we can with the gifts that God has given us.

In Jesus' story, the talents were distributed by the owner. Now a "talent" was a very large amount of money. It wasn't as though the owner gave five dollars to one of his servants, two dollars to another and one dollar to the third. A "talent" was part of the money system in the New Testament. A talent is equal to about 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius is a common labourer's daily wage, a talent would be roughly equivalent to 6,000 days wages ... 20 years wages for the average worker. Therefore five talents, the largest amount entrusted to any of the servants, is comparable to one hundred years worth of salaried labour, an astronomical amount of money. If we work on an annual salary of A\$55,000 – just one talent would be the equivalent of one million, one hundred and ten thousand dollars (A\$1,110,000). So in Australian wages terms, this parable is about sums of \$5.5 million dollars, \$2.2 million dollars and \$1.1 million dollars.

The servants were to do the best they could with the enormously valuable amounts they received.

St Paul spoke about this parable's principle when he wrote to the Romans. In chapter 12 of his letter he wrote – "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:6-8). ***Do the best you can with the gifts that God has given you.***

One of the encouraging features of life in our parish is to see both the great variety of gifts that people have, and also to see the ways in which people are using those gifts as best they can. What I am going to say now is not in any order of priority. Some parishioners have a well-established gift of hospitality. Others with a creative eye have a gift for flower arranging. Yet others are talented with administration. Others with music – either instrumental or vocal or both. Others have the talent of caring hearts about others that is shown in visiting and prayer. Some have the gift of working with children. Yet others have the gift of generous financial support of St Andrew's. Some have the gift of perseverance and hanging-in there. And others who have a practical talent can fix things and make broken-down things work again. Some have a talent for reading in public – and with any kind of good luck, some have the gift of preaching.

And there are other gifts too that I haven't mentioned. If you think about events that have taken place in our parish life over the past month or so you will identify some of these other talents. And here it is true that we accept the responsibility for doing the best we can with the gifts that God has given us.

Here at St Andrew's people use their talents in the best way they can – but we also use those talents in areas other than St Andrew's. In service clubs around Adelaide ... in working as volunteers with community organisations ... in local Councils and groups ... helping students and neighbours. The talents aren't given to us to use exclusively for our church community. It's a form of Christian witness that we work in these other excellent areas.

Here's are two little exercises for us to do. The first is to think about yourself, and identify the talents that you have. You may be a "5-talenter" or a "2-talenter." It doesn't matter. God has given us talents to use for his glory, and so it is right that we should bring them to mind about ourselves. Are we doing the best we can with these talents that God has given us? The second exercise is to think about some other people who share our life of fellowship and worship at St Andrew's. Identify the talents you can see in some of those people. And you will also be able to see the way in which they too are doing their best they can with the talents God has given them.

In voluntary organisations, it's difficult sometimes to hang in there and persevere with the service we offer on a long-term and ongoing basis. How easy it is for us to withdraw occasionally and hope that our consequent empty place will be filled by someone else. But not only did Jesus say that we must do the best we can with the gifts we have been given. St Paul also wrote ".... It is required in stewards that they be found ***faithful***." (I Corinthians 4:2). Our service to God and others has this two-pronged facet - - - to do the best with the gifts we have been given, and also to b faithful in what we do.

This is the message for us from today's Gospel as we head towards the Church season of Advent. This is the message for us as we go out to live our lives in the community this week. This is the message for us as we love and serve God, who himself is always faithful. (1 Corinthians 1:9; Lamentations 3:22-23; Psalm 33:4).