

## ***The Church's prayer for this Sunday***

Heavenly Father,  
whose blessed Son was revealed  
to destroy the works of the devil  
and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life:  
grant that we, having this hope,  
may purify ourselves even as he is pure;  
that when he shall appear in power and great glory  
we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;  
where he is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## **Bible readings and reflection for Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

### **Psalm 70**

- 1 Lord, you have been our refuge •  
from one generation to another.
- 2 Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or the earth and the world were formed, •  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- 3 You turn us back to dust and say: •  
'Turn back, O children of earth.'
- 4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday, •  
which passes like a watch in the night.
- 5 You sweep them away like a dream; •  
they fade away suddenly like the grass.
- 6 In the morning it is green and flourishes; •  
in the evening it is dried up and withered.
- 7 For we consume away in your displeasure; •  
we are afraid at your wrathful indignation.
- 8 You have set our misdeeds before you •  
and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.
- [ 9 When you are angry, all our days are gone; •  
our years come to an end like a sigh.
- 10 The days of our life are three score years and ten,  
or if our strength endures, even four score; •  
yet the sum of them is but labour and sorrow,  
for they soon pass away and we are gone.
- 11 Who regards the power of your wrath •  
and your indignation like those who fear you?

] 12 So teach us to number our days •  
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**

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## **Today's reading from the epistles: 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11**

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! <sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; <sup>7</sup>for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup>For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

**For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.**

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## **Today's reading from the Gospels: Matthew 25:14-30**

### **The Parable of the Talents**

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>22</sup>And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you

handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” 23His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”24Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” 26But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter?27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. 28So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. 29For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. 30As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

**For the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.**

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## **A reflection from Revd Paul Garnell, interim lead minister in Coton**

*‘Priests are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent. With their Bishop and fellow ministers, they are to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God’s new creation. They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord; they are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for his family, to search for his children in the wilderness of this world’s temptations, and to guide them through its confusions, that they may be saved through Christ for ever. Formed by the word, they are to call their hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ’s name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins. With all God’s people, they are to tell the story of God’s love. They are to baptise new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith. They are to unfold the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God. They are to preside at the Lord’s table and lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. They are to bless the people in God’s name. They are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, and intercede for all in need. They are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death. Guided by the Spirit, they are to discern and foster the gifts of all God’s people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith. We trust that long ago you began to weigh and ponder all this, and that you are fully determined, by the grace of God, to devote yourself wholly to his service, so that as you daily follow the rule and teaching of our Lord and grow into his likeness, God may sanctify the lives of all with whom you have to do.’*

This statement, no doubt familiar to those who have been ordained and to those who have attended ordination services, is taken from the declarations section of the *Common Worship Ordination Services* book. Not exclusively, as it is also found in the ‘*thee and thou*’ version of its predecessor, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and the Ordinal of 1662.

On one hand, the job description – to call it that, is relatively straight forward. This is what you as a priest are ‘called’ to do. On the other, it is a responsibility of biblical proportions – mess this up and your salvation could be at risk. ‘In the name of our Lord we bid you remember the greatness of the trust that is now to be committed to your charge. Remember always with thanksgiving that the treasure now to be entrusted to you is Christ’s own flock, bought by the shedding of his blood on the cross. It is to him that you will render account for your stewardship of his people.’ “Ok, where’s the door, I’m off!” A fleeting thought for many a would be ordinand, I’m sure. But here is where the link with our gospel reading for today is made. The ‘it is to him that you will render account...’ is referenced as a footnote in the ordinal to today’s gospel reading from Matthew along with Luke 12.42-46 and 1 Corinthians 4.1-4. God as both sovereign and judge. Similarly, although not referenced, the Apostle’s Creed also relates: ‘he (Jesus) will come to judge the living and the dead.’ The affirmation we all stand and declare in some form each Sunday, unless as present circumstances dictate you’re in the lounge or study or even the bath (yes, there are people who listen to these audios in the bath – no names mentioned!) So, there’s no getting out of it – scripture and tradition put it very much to us that, by virtue of our baptism into the priesthood of all believers we will be *called* to account for the treasure Christ has entrusted to each of us, only by the sounds of it, he will be a lot more peeved with the clergy than anyone else!

So, to the parable of the talents. I would suggest taking a look at both the Matthew and Luke 19: 11-27 readings. The core of the story is the same – a man leaves some assets with a number of servants; and those assets come back to him either multiplied, or just as he left them; the productive servants are praised and rewarded, the unproductive are condemned. Beyond that core narrative, there are many variations of detail and interpretation.

Now I could spend a very long time talking about those variations and their implications (tying myself up in all sorts of theological knots), but I would rather not, because I would like to leave you to do that. I can hear you now saying, ‘You wicked, lazy Curate!’ But you see on this occasion I am entrusting you with the five, two and one talents to do with them as you see fit. I know if I left them to my dad, regardless of value - they would all end up under the mattress!

But there is an important lesson here for each of us to take away...something Alison pointed out to me during supervision in the wonderful gardens at Madingley Hall last week. It was along the lines of not beating yourself up when it comes to our personal understanding and interpretation of scripture. Yes, the likes of Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury may have the brains of the five-talent worker and that is fine, but Jesus doesn’t just speak with the supposed experts; in fact, he spent a lot of his energy challenging and being rude about those who thought they had it all wrapped up. Not that I am making such a distinction with Rowan - rather he is a very learned and holy man. He did, however, turn me down for spiritual direction citing a busy work schedule, but I won’t hold that against him. Jesus’ audiences were mostly regular folk; and his sayings and teachings are for the regular people of today too. They are not mine, but yours. And remember, one of the greatest differences between a story and say a commandment is that it is open-ended – it lives in us rather than instructing us, it is open and not closed.

So, to avoid the accusation that I am obfuscating, I will limit myself to just a few comments on this parable. It may seem to be an economics lesson - and indeed, having read this week of the ways in which one might actually make money through various risky investments in say, Covid-19 vaccines or a bet on whether Trump or Biden become president, I was reminded that those who have money make money, while those who don’t and just get by consider nothing more than

how the rent will get paid, or if they'll have enough left over to feed the kids never mind themselves. We've always known the rich get richer; but this parable isn't about a divine endorsement of that. It is about faith versus fear. To be faithful is to take a chance. To be fearful is to be insecure, defensive, self-limiting. You and I have been given the gift of faith regardless of ability; in *your* case, or in my case, it be the tiniest thing, but it is inconceivably rich in potential and it needs to be used. If we don't use it, it is a wasted opportunity. Discipleship costs – the responsibility is ours. Returning to the Ordinal for some wordy spiritual balm to mitigate the earlier judgement references, the statement continues; 'You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged, and your understanding of the scriptures enlightened. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.' 'Good and faithful servant!' Amen.