



TCH33

32nd Sunday Ordinary Time Aiii – Excerpts From Proverbs 31, 1 Thessalonians 5, Matthew 25

The Fox and Hen

Whilst first and foremost a critique of the Pharisees, this parable does call on us to embrace the responsibility of having been given so much
Fr David King – 15th November 2020

You will benefit greatly from reading through the Gospel before reading this (Matthew 25.14-30)

1. The Test

Some of you may know that I first got really interested in Christianity when I got sent to a new secondary school in year 9, when I was about 13 years old. The school was not a faith school, it was a very secular school, but ironically, it was there that I met this bunch of Christians. After spending a bit of time with them, my head was buzzing with questions, I was so interested and there were so many things that I felt I wanted and needed to explore now. So I decided to do A-level RE to try and learn a bit more about it all.

- The only thing was, I was the only person in the entire school that wanted to do A-level RE! But fair play to the school, they allowed me to do it, though they didn't have a classroom free for us to use, so we used to drag a table and chairs into the corridors and we had our lessons there in the corridors.
- I absolutely loved A-level RE. I had a great teacher and we used to sit there for hours and hours in the corridors chatting about anything and everything, occasionally even RE. Half of the A-level was about John's Gospel, and it was completely mind-blowing digging into this Gospel, there's so much going on in there, and I've still got some of that information at my finger-tips.
- So I loved it and was learning so much, and was enjoying finding the answers to some of these questions that I had. And, actually, the fact that I had a big exam coming up at the end of the two years was a complete irrelevance to me, though when it finally came around, I instantly regretted that it had been a complete irrelevance to me.
 - I passed it, but I didn't do particularly well, and I often feel that the school, and in fact, the teacher, must have felt a bit hard done by having given me 1-2-1 tuition for two years, it almost reflected as badly on them as it did on me. Thankfully it was enough to get into university, and off I went to continue my studies and my investigation.
- A lot of people think that what's going on in this parable is some sort of heavenly exam. The servants are us, Jesus' disciples, and when Jesus returns he's gonna grade us according to how well we've used what he's given us. The first two servants score highly and are rewarded, but the last servant, well, he scores pretty poorly, and he is outta here!
- I can see how people arrive at that conclusion, but there are many problems with that interpretation. Firstly, the parables are not primarily about us at all, they are about Jesus and who *he* is, and what *he* is doing. Secondly, Jesus said he came to call sinners not the righteous, so how does that fit with this interpretation, and thirdly, Jesus himself says that it's not about this, he begins the parable saying 'the Kingdom of heaven will be like this...' that is God's reign arriving on earth in him, so let's not just ignore what Jesus himself says it's about.

2. The Talents

- To really get to the bottom of this parable we have to go back to the book of Genesis. In Genesis chapter 12, when God calls Abraham to leave his home and travel to the promised land, God blesses Abraham and says 'I will make you a great nation, I will bless you and make your name great...I will bless those who bless you...' blah blah blah, and he ends by saying "*and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"
- Now, that last bit is totally crucial! That's what Abraham's family (ie., the Israelite people) were supposed to do and be, they were supposed to be a blessing to the world with what God had given them. They were to receive that blessing and radiate it outwards.
- Now, turning to the parable, like all our Englishman, Scotsman and Irishman jokes, the emphasis in this parable falls on the third servant. He stands in here for the scribes and Pharisees, the leaders of the people. *They* are the ones who have been given so much by God. They've been blessed with the Torah, the Temple, blessed with God's favour and love, and *they've done nothing with it*. In fact they've completely buried it, they certainly haven't blessed the world with it as they had been called to. They'd just kept those amazing gifts for themselves and their own little group.
- Now the master is returning, Jesus is entering Jerusalem, and their negligence, which will actually culminate in their rejection of Jesus himself, will be exposed for what it is. That's what the parable is about! Like the others, it is a commentary on what's happening right here and now in Jerusalem. But superbly, it also acts as a final challenge, calling on them to respond to Jesus in the right way.

3. The Twist

- Now that we've understood it properly, we can begin to take a little significance from it ourselves. And, although the parable was not primarily meant for us, I think absolutely we can still see in it a call to embrace the responsibility that we now have to use what God has given us for the benefit of the world.
- Jesus has given the church the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Scriptures, the gift of the Eucharist. These gifts are meant for the whole world, they are meant to be shared, they're not for us and us alone. That's a legitimate and appropriate takeaway. And, now that we've understood the parable properly, we can embrace that responsibility free from the threat of being thrown out into the dark if we don't measure up properly, because that's not what the parable is about.
- But secondly, and most importantly, there is a beautiful twist here in the parable, or rather a twist in how this plays out in actuality. In the parable, the servant is thrown out into the dark where there is weeping and wailing. But think about what *actually* happens. Well, *Jesus* is the one who is about to be thrown into darkness where there will be plenty of weeping and wailing. *Jesus* is the one who is about to be killed. This is an extraordinary twist. What's happening is that Jesus allows himself to receive the punishment that is their due. He allows himself to be killed in their place, and takes upon himself their sentence, and the cross becomes his way of rescuing even his enemies.
- This parable is amazing, there is so much to take-away, and we have just scraped the surface. It's first and foremost a critique of those who are rejecting him. But it also serves to remind us to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to our care, as well as causing us to stand in awe and wonder at the cross, through which Jesus redeems the world.
Jesus, thank you for the cross, help us to use what you have given us for the benefit of the world.