

Are you truly prepared for the "Good News"?

Greetings! It's it great to be here as part of our church family, today we come together to celebrate the 25th Sunday after Pentecost. May I welcome all who are watching our service via 'Live screen'.

Today's Gospel reading from Matthew continues Jesus' teaching about the coming kingdom of heaven; last week the parable of the ten bridesmaids and their lamps and now this week the parable about ***'a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.'***

It is also worth noting a similar story is found in Luke 19:12-27***.***

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The word 'Gospel' means 'good news', and we Christians believe that, in Jesus Christ, the whole world is offered the good news of God's love for them!
The New Testament also bears witness to the fact that not everyone receives God's love as 'good news'. Incredible as it may seem, some people look at Jesus and hate him and the God he represents!

- Some feel threatened,
- some feel bored,
- some hate the way Jesus breaks the rules about God,
- and some do not recognize what is on offer.

The passages today from scripture, that the Lectionary gives us to reflect on in these Sundays before Advent are full of foreboding and warning.

- It is possible to reject the love of God, and so reject your own life.
- It is possible to live in such a way that you don't recognize life when it stands in front of you!

Our 1st reading from Zephaniah, one of the 12 minor prophets, in v12, describes and characterises a people as complacent. They believe they have a good life because it is materially comfortable. We can recognize this way of life in our western civilization! They are well housed and fed, and they believe that they can keep God at a safe distance. After all, their wealth has enabled them to keep all other uncomfortable things at bay, so why not God too! It's not that they don't believe in God, it's just that they think they have bought God's neutrality … He won't interfere one way or the other!

To them, God comes as a hostile and destructive army, taking away all their security and giving them only terror! There is no 'good news' for them, because the only 'good news' they would recognize is no news.

They don't want to hear anything about God at all. However, unfortunately, in God's world, that is not an option.

In today's gospel reading, the slave in Matthew's gospel is not that far gone! He knows the master quite well, but he fears and dislikes him. We have no idea what has led to this state of affairs between master and slave. Obviously, the master is a bit of an independent thinker.

From historical sources, a talent in Biblical Times equated to about 15 to 20 years of labour for a standard worker, probably worth over a million dollars today.

Not many masters would give their slaves large amounts of money, and then go off for an unspecified length of time, to an unknown destination, leaving no instructions. The master doesn't tell the slaves what they are expected to do with the property, but, clearly, he knows them quite well, and they know him. They know that this is a test of some kind, and they approach it, each in his own way.

The slave, who is given one talent believes that the master doesn't think much of him. There may be a longer history to this than we are told, but it is obvious to him that the master trusts him less than the others, because he gives him less! And this slave is both afraid and resentful. His resentment comes bubbling out when the master finally returns, and the slave finds himself pouring out what he really thinks of the master! He knows he's going to get into trouble, but he's determined to have his say first!

The master's response is interesting. He recognizes the slave's description of himself, but not why it led to that result! '***If you're so scared of me',*** the master says, ***'why didn't you try harder to please me?'***

And to this the slave has no answer. He had decided, long ago, that nothing he did would please his master, and he has given up trying.

To this man, God is not 'good news' because he is too obsessed with his own failure. He cannot see that all the other slaves are rewarded for their efforts, irrespective of whether they earned big profits or small.

He has turned his own failure into a weapon!

- ***'This is your fault, God'*** he shouts***, 'not mine'!***
- He cannot recognize good news because he doesn't actually know himself at all.
- In order to hear good news, we have to have some idea of what constitutes good news for our situation.

- But this slave is only looking for the downside of every situation.
- He doesn't want any good news, because he is sure there will be a drawback in it somewhere!
- Many of our brothers inside prison, have this understanding of God, because of their crimes, but when the Gospel is shared with them, through a loving Christian Community, the scales come off their eyes, like St Paul's road to Damascus experience!

From our letter to the Thessalonians, they want good news, though, even they are slightly apprehensive about it. This good news is not something to take lightly. You have to be prepared for it, and live your life in anticipation of it, stick together and help each other train for it!

Why should the *'good news'* of God's love be so alarming?

- Perhaps, because maybe few actually know how to be loved.
- We know how to be pampered, or to indulge ourselves, or to whine about being misunderstood.
- But to be loved with God's total, consuming, transforming and utterly perceptive love?
- Are we ready for that?

Amen!