

Sunday 6th October – Matthew 25 ‘A Harvest of our Talents’

Sometimes we all need to make an excuse. I wonder what your best excuse has been over the years? I’m pretty good at finding ropey excuses for being late – but I felt a lot better this week after reading a list of real excuses people had made for being late to work – how about these: I accidentally got on a plane (??); I broke my arm catching a falling sandwich; somebody glued my doors and windows shut so I couldn’t get out of the house; and my personal favourite, my false teeth flew out of the window while driving to work. There’s an idea for the next Fixadent advert....

Today we’re taking a look at possibly the most famous excuse you’ll find in the whole bible. It’s a well-known story of Jesus, I imagine many of you will have heard the story numerous times. A rich boss goes away and leaves his servants in charge of his money. He gives 5 bags of gold to one, two bags to another and 1 bag to a third. The servants with 5 bags and 2 bags put their money to work and each double the boss’s investment. The third however, just buries it in the ground. When the boss returns, the guy who buries the bag in the ground says that he knew his boss was a hard man, so he hid the money to make sure it was there when the boss got back.

Needless to say, the boss wasn’t happy. And Jesus uses this story to make two points. The first is implicit: actually what the third servant got totally wrong was his view of the boss. ‘So you knew I was a hard nut, eh?’ says the boss. Actually the servant got the boss all wrong. This boss was generous and fair, and Jesus wants us to know that God is just like that boss. He’s not a tyrant or a bully, so we don’t have to cower or hide or put on a show. And before we get into the meat of today’s content, just take a moment to take that thought to heart – and give thanks.

The second point Jesus is making to his hearers, and our focus for today, is this: **use what you have**. It doesn’t matter if it’s more or less than the next person, that’s their business, not yours – the boss has given a portion to you, and all you need to do is to use it, to offer it in his service. Use what you have.

That all sounds very simple – but the truth for many of us is very different. When it comes to offering our lives to God, most of us can find excuses, like the third servant. And in calling them excuses I don’t want to minimise their importance. We are all frail, imperfect creatures. And Jesus knows that – but the good news is that this passage also addresses all those reasons we can find *not* to give God our best shot. And in sharing these today, I want to stress that I want you to listen for the one that applies to you. Some you can happily ignore, that’s not you – but maybe there’s one that is. So, hear me out, today – please!

The biggest block for many of us is the power of comparison. I hear this a lot, maybe you do too: I can’t give this gift or talent to God because I’m not as good as so-and-so, there’s others can do it better. But the point is that God doesn’t expect you to be as good as so-and-so – in fact, in this story Jesus is very clear that the boss distributes his gold unevenly. Some people are given more than others. What matters is not whether you’re a concert violinist or third chime bar in the community percussion band but that you offer what you have. *Every offering matters.* It’s not about other people – it’s about you.

The next most popular reason is this: I haven’t got time. And sometimes, that’s true. There are seasons in our lives when we are just flat out. And let’s never forget that the whole of our lives matter to God. Church work or other voluntary work is not more important than family or your paid work – it’s all for God. But at the same time, it’s not less important either. And in our passage, let’s note that the boss was away a long time. So, this boss is not expecting an immediate return, or a quick fix. He gives us all time to offer what we have to him. I think that means that all of us have the opportunity to offer what we have to God. Over a long period – say, years – we all have some time, and let’s not pretend that we don’t. Maybe this is not a season of time for you – but maybe for some of you, it is.

The third reason many of us give for not offering our time and talents to God is that we are afraid of criticism or failure. And that's important – we may have life experiences that make it particularly hard to cross that hurdle. But let's look again at the story. Who does the boss criticise? It's not those who try to use what they have – it's those who *don't*. The only failure, according to Jesus, is *not* trying, is not giving it a go.

So never let your secret fears stop you having a go. You don't have to be perfect, you just have to give it your best shot. And that's worth saying, isn't it? If you're doing it voluntarily, it doesn't mean doing it worse than you would ever do it in your paid work – Jesus deserves our best shot just as much as our worldly boss. In the end, the only thing that Jesus asks is that we give it our best shot with what we have. Those are the good and faithful servants.

The final reason we might have is that deep down, we think these are *our* gifts – so we choose whether we use them or not. But actually, they're all God's. Our gifts are precisely that – gifts. We can develop them and nurture them, but we can't create them – they're given to us.

I can't sing. I've always been useless at music. Because of my job, and after years of practice, I can just about hold a tune, and if need be, belt it out at a funeral or a wedding, which usually feels like a solo. But I'll never really be able to sing – put someone next to me singing a descant and I can't hold the tune.

But I am good at other things. God didn't give me a bag of musical gold, but I did get some others. And it's those bags God wants me to use. Whatever your bags are, whatever your gift is or gifts are – they're God's and God *expects* you to use them – otherwise you're just burying them in the ground.

So as I land, I want to say one simple thing today – and here I'm particularly talking to members of our church families at All Saints Milton Keynes Village and St Mary's Wavendon, but if you're watching from further afield maybe think about your church family - **we need you!**

No church is ever the finished article. And I have a dream, a passion – to see everyone here using their gifts, both in everyday life and here at church. To be honest, there are so many things we could do if more people offered their gift. From the outside, it might look like a decent group of gifted people doing everything – but I know that if you asked them, they would tell you they'd love the help. And some would love to hand over what they're doing so they could do something else. And there are other things we're not doing at the moment, that we could do if we had the right gifts to do it. You might have that gift!

So today I'm launching what we're calling a Skills Audit – which is really just a posh way of saying that we want to see what gifts there are in our church family which could be offered to bless us and/or the community. **If you're looking to get more involved, now is the time!** So talk to me, or drop me a line – have a pray if you haven't had a chance to think yet. But don't miss this opportunity. Don't be held back by fear of comparison or failure.

Ultimately, church is much more satisfying if you're involved. And God has given you bags of talent – it might be 1, 2 or 5 bags, that doesn't matter. What matters is: how are you going to use them?