



The Parish Church of St Augustine, Endcliffe

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Welcoming all, Following Jesus, Growing together



Private Prayer

Sunday 15 November 2020
2nd Sunday before Advent

Collect of the Day

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy, restrain us from excess, and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Readings

Zephaniah 1.7, 12-end

⁷ Be silent before the Lord God!
For the day of the Lord is at hand ...

1 Thessalonians 5.1-11

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When 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! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober;

Psalm 90.1-12

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.

⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But 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. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 25.14-30

14 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then 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." ²¹His 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." ²²And 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."

Brief Reflections

In a world where the rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer, who likes to hear Jesus declare, "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" (Matt 25:29)?! That can't be right! Jesus also said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25 // Luke 18:25). So what is this about? What is Jesus saying? In order to understand, we need to think of the entire parable, the story that Jesus is telling. Indeed, we need to consider all of this Sunday's readings, for they all talk about times and seasons, and in particular the end times.

In our New Testament readings, both Jesus and St Paul hint at the hope linked to Christ's return, his *parousia*, and encourage us to prepare for that return.

Jesus tells the story of a lord who goes away for a while and entrusts his property to three servants until such a time that he returns. Two of them take risks; they invest their gifts and effect a return for their lord. The third, however, does not. He plays it safe and buries his gift, returning it intact to his lord upon his return. Whilst the lord praises and rewards the first two, he deals harshly with the third, risk-averse servant. The lord calls the latter 'wicked and lazy', strips him of his gift and has him thrown out 'in the outer darkness'. What is striking, however, are the servant's reasons for not using his one talent. He saw his lord as harsh, unfair, even greedy. Out of fear, he never takes possession of the talent; indeed, when returning it to his lord, the servant says, "Here you have what is YOURS." And yet, if the lord in this parable is metaphorically Jesus, the greatest failure of the third servant is not the fact that he doesn't know his Messiah and has no genuine relationship with him, therefore; it is that he buries his gift ... He doesn't put it on shelf. He doesn't just forget it. He doesn't give it to the bankers – allowing it to live, therefore, and achieve its potential. No. The servant's greatest failure is that he hides his gift in the dark; he buries it – as if it were dead. The servant has no faith in his talent, and no faith in his lord. He himself is in the dark ... The irony is that, as his 'go to', darkness and death are his fate at the end of the story.

By contrast, in the passage from 1st Thessalonians, Paul encourages Christians to remember that we belong to the day; to light 'for God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ'... and so, in order to combat the threat or the allure of darkness, we need to 'put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation'. As we approach Advent and the seasonal celebrations surrounding our Saviour Jesus Christ's first coming amongst us, let us pray that, by the grace of God, we 'encourage one another and build up each other'. What does that look like for you?

Prayer

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening
into the house and gate of heaven,
to enter that gate and dwell in that house,
where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light;
no noise nor silence, but one equal music;
no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession;
no ends or beginnings, but one equal eternity;
in the habitations of your glory and dominion,
world without end.

Amen.