

Sermon 2nd Before Advent

Proverbs 31.10-31, Thessalonians 5.1-6, Matthew 25.14-30

Risky Love

You may have read about the words of the year 2020. It's run by one of the dictionary companies and tells us which words are the most evocative of the year. Apparently number one is lockdown – no one ever asks me to contribute to such surveys but unsurprisingly the pandemic drives most furlough, stay at home etc – if only it had all been Fake News. Many of the letters, emails and messages I receive have another little phrase – no it isn't are your sermons covid secure – its **stay safe**. It seems to be a new way of signing off. It's a stronger take on what we would often say before when we would say: **take care** when saying good bye to someone. Last week spending the week at Commando Training Centre Royal Marines I was reminded of how often people would say "keep your head down" to those about to deploy on operations and of course many may have kept their head down but still did not return alive. Last week at remembrance above all we remembered those who did not stay safe. Our lives would be quite different had they stayed safe. Freedom can be costly and often involves risk not safety.

The cold truth is that nothing great in life is achieved without risk. This is true of military campaigns, business, scientific, sporting and cultural endeavour – (you know that's true from a cursory glance at the number of sequels and prequels that contaminate the film lists). It's true of personal relationships too – preparing folk for marriage is always a reminder of that – there is always risk even if it is not acknowledged by the less than wise.

In our parable today those congratulated by the master are those that took risk – they traded with his money. I've been wondering this week what would have happened if they had lost it all or most. The parable does not explore this but I suspect it would have taken us into other parables such as the prodigal son and the master would have been more like the good father or mother who would say at least you tried rather than a type of allegorical Alan Sugar saying "you failed you're fired."

It is the one who does nothing that incurs the wrath of the master. This is as all parables are a parable of the kingdom – the world of Gods values

god's life his kingdom involves risk. I am not about to advocate a reckless risk taking life for heavenly promotion. But using what we have been given and taking risk is at the heart of this parable. Recognition that we don't have ultimate ownership is also at the heart of it.

Wisdom not recklessness is required to know when and how to take risks, but it is never a guarantee and the rewards from the endeavour will not necessarily be yours. If personal gain is the primary motive any success is as vacuous and fleeting as the charm and beauty in the reading from proverbs.

Look at the risk God Takes with us – what he invests. From creation out of nothing to the offer of recreation in Christ it is all risk. What's in it for God – nothing except love for us. The risk in worldly terms is a futile one – God gains nothing we are offered everything. This foolishness of God is fully exposed on the cross. And yet as St. Paul puts it the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. It is an eternal exchange of death for life not a temporary transaction for mutual benefit.

There is much in the gospels about watching and waiting for God – the parable before this is the wise and foolish virgins for example. But we can confuse such a waiting as a passive, inactive watching. This is not meant to be so. Waiting for God involves not busyness for busyness's sake but a kingdom focussed life within this life.

In the letter to the Thessalonians Paul tells us “you don't know and cannot know when the end or your end is coming therefore be vigilant at all times – use the light of God to illuminate what is good and right to choose the way of life.” Our OT lesson from proverbs is not so much about a good wife as the way of wisdom – who is always feminine in the scriptures – get on with a good and productive life – praise wisdom not charm and beauty. So we have wisdom set alongside a parable about taking risk.

Often we can see our well known parable as a simple tale of using the gifts we have been given rather than hiding them. But the gifts, the talents do not belong to the receiver, and neither does the gain. What the productive two do – trading cannot be without risk.

We cannot explore this without thinking of motive – the motive of the wife in proverbs is the husband and the household – and note how charity is also

a key part of the wise life. It is not a life of busyness for self but a full life that is self-less. In the parable the two praiseworthy servants' motive is to do something for their master – they are not paralysed by fear. Sadly the third is. His primary motive for burying the talent was to preserve his own life to Stay Safe. His motive was about himself not the other, he is paralysed by fear. He loses everything because he has risked nothing. In Our faith we gain everything because God has risk his very self in Christ for us. The way of the cross is risky; it is the way of the saints and we are in midst of All Saints tide. It will culminate next week as we celebrate the end of the Christian journey - Christ the King with all the saints our destiny and hope. It is not a journey and life without risk but the reward, for self and others, surely make it a non-choice like those we remembered last week.

There is a South African phrase at the point of parting – Go Well Stay Well. I like it very much – it's about journey and being well – in all the dangers and risk of the venture and journey. So as you use your talents this week for the sake of others may you take risks with wisdom and always remember what risks our Lord has taken for you. *Go well stay well.*

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