

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor  
Twenty fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, 19 November 2023  
Reverend Martin Johnson

*Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18; Psalm 90:1-8,12; Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30*

During an idle moment during the week I indulged in some channel surfing, I came across a programme hosted by the poet Pam Ayres. I say poet, but such gems as 'Oh, I wish I looked after me teeth' and 'They should have asked my husband' are not exactly the stuff of deeply profound word smithing. But what I did remember was that she was discovered on a Talent Show in the 70s called Opportunity Knocks. It was a show which launched the careers of many minor celebrities such as Pete the plate spinning dog...don't ask! I thought about the modern manifestation of that programme 'Australia's got talent,' a programme I generally avoid, I wondered about talent, and I recalled that talent was a word we teenagers would have used to describe some of the better-looking girls in the class!

Perhaps like me you have looked up at the night sky and felt a sense of awe, mingled with a twinge of insecurity. Certainly, the idea that what I am seeing is light years away and that I am in fact looking back in time is beyond my imaging. The Psalmist too grappled with all this: For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday passing: or like one watch of the night. And any thought that 'it's all about me' is quickly dispelled by the sheer vastness of the cosmos, a vastness few of us, if any, can comprehend. You might indeed be a world leader in sport or academia, you might be world leader in government or business, you might be a world class entertainer, you might indeed be viewed by a spotty 18-year-old as a bit of talent but against the backdrop of space and time...well, it rather puts thing into perspective!

Each of us has been bestowed with talent in one form or another, each of us is indeed unique. But these gifts are not what this morning's gospel is all about. The Talents are *not* that which some of us have been fortunate enough to be bestowed with, but about a vast wealth that has been *entrusted* to us, a wealth with which we called to be boldly enterprising! The wealth is the Kingdom of God which has been entrusted to our keeping.

Even a brief glance at the internet reveals a very different way of thinking. What are *your* God given talents, it says, are you hiding them, it asks. If this is the case, if this is what our reading is about, then there are a few questions that need to be answered. The first might be what kind of God deals out talents to folk or not as the case may be, and is there some kind of league table? This is a very human way of looking at things, this is the way we tend to determine who is important or worthy in our communities, at worse this is what the cult of celebrity or personality looks like and more often than not this is not God given. A church which has this view of God can very easily find itself grading Christians, sifting the wheat from the chaff.

We are, as you know, in a cycle of readings from 1 Thessalonians, a letter written to a very early Christian community, one waiting expectantly for Christ's imminent return. Much of Paul's letter concerns hopeful, patience in waiting. Matthew is clearly aware of the angst that many felt about Christ's return, in this gospel passage he tells us that the master has gone on a long journey and only returns after 'a long time.' He has entrusted his servants with vast wealth, even the lowliest of them, and returns to see how they have put that wealth to good use.

As I mentioned last week Advent is in the air, and yes, we look to coming of the child of Bethlehem, but we are also called to take the long view, the view described in our Psalm: Before the mountains were born or the earth and the world were brought to be: from eternity to eternity you are God. If then, we see these talents as our abilities or appearance, we are rather taking a short view, these things will pass. Advent calls on us to take that long view to consider carefully and prayerfully, patiently what we are doing to further God's kingdom as our collect reminded us today, the things of eternity.

If we can take this long view a number of things happen. It will lift from us the burden of competition, rivalry, the fear of missing out, from the endless making of bucket lists, the issues

of aging and those twinges of insecurity. It will create in us a willingness to share, removing that fear of being without, of not having enough. It is all about an eschatological ethic, about doing things that are more than the practical, the utilitarian or the simply pragmatic. It is about a wider vision that speaks of the universal, boundless love of God. It is all about awe not insecurity!

But what about the poor blighter who only got a small dose of the kingdom, the one who decided to bury his bit! We cannot say that the kingdom comes in neatly measured amounts, that is not the point of the parable. What is being said is that the kingdom is sometimes an idea that we can barely conceive, we will sometimes sense it only as the merest glimpse (sometimes that is all we cope with), but it is still priceless treasure, it is still something that we take hold of and celebrate and give thanks for and sing about! Blessed indeed are the poor in Spirit. Central to the parable is an understanding of God. The God who trusts us, who entrusts to us the vast wealth of the kingdom. This is far from the mean-spirited God, that the lazy servant describes, completely the opposite! We are entrusted with just enough of the kingdom that we can deal with given each of our situations. We should be only too glad that there some amongst us, visionaries perhaps, whose glimpses of God's kingdom are in sharper focus than our own, and we give thanks for their willingness to share that focus with us.

Each of us is here this morning because we have caught a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. What we do with that momentary glimpse has cosmic repercussions, far beyond our limited vision. How might we invest it, when it comes to God's grace, we are all called to be entrepreneurs. Amen.