

The Benefice of Malpas & Threapwood & Bickerton

The 2nd Sunday before Advent

Sunday 15th November 2020



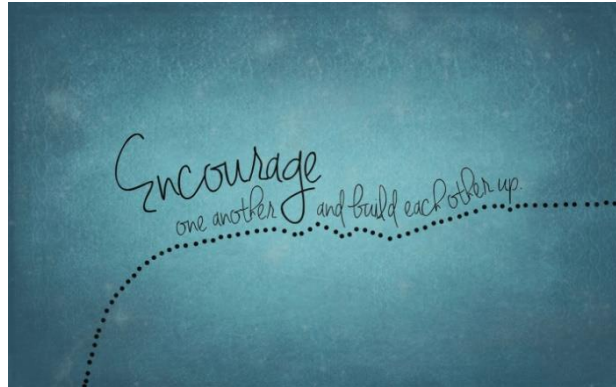
The Collect for 2nd Sunday before Advent

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

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now 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; 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.'



A reflection from Revd Helen:

When I read today's Epistle one word leapt out at me – "encourage". 'Encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing', writes Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians. I was immediately reminded of a recent conversation I had with someone (whose permission I have to share his story). We'll call him Jim (but that's not his real name). Jim was working hard in his job throughout the first lockdown but was then made redundant over the summer. He pulled out all the stops to find a new job and was successful, but the job did not begin well. The job was a leap up from his last position and the Coronavirus restrictions in place made for a difficult start, having to work remotely from home while at the same time trying to get to grips with new office procedures, and, of course, with little or no integration with fellow workers. Jim then had to self-isolate when a household member tested positive for Covid. He felt even more cut off and this exacerbated the usual challenges of starting a new job. He felt out of his depth and feared that at the end of his six month probationary period he would be shown the door. And then last week something happened that transformed both Jim's perception of and attitude to his situation. On separate occasions colleagues happened to give Jim some words of encouragement, telling him that he was doing well and had made a really good start. When sharing with me what a difference this made to him, Jim explained how he wasn't chasing Brownie points or gold stars, he just wanted some reassurance that he was on the right track. 'Don't get me wrong', he added, 'I'm not out of the woods yet – I'm still finding it tough, but I'm encouraged to keep going, and to keep working to the best of my ability'. I wonder if those who gave Jim that much needed encouragement are aware of the impact of their words and actions?

The church at Thessalonica to whom Paul was writing was something of a *model* church – in that it was a good example and an inspiration to others. It was full of faith, love and, especially, hope. People marvelled at how expectantly the Thessalonians awaited the return of Jesus. Paul was encouraged at the state of the Thessalonians but he believed that they still needed more instruction and even more encouragement. Paul reminds them of Jesus' return because remembering that Jesus

might come at any time is the greatest encouragement to them – and importantly to us - to live a life pleasing to God. We can see in this situation how once again, encouragement is such a motivating force.

Returning for a moment to our friend Jim – Jim was determined to use his particular ‘talents’ - his skills, intellect, energy, time and education - to the best of his ability in his new job. God is so generous and gives us all differing gifts. We see this portrayed in today’s gospel reading. A ‘talent’ was equivalent to a huge sum today. One man received five talents, another two and another one. Even the man with one talent received much. The story shows us that what really matters is how we use our God-given gifts. We are not all equal in talent but we can be equal in effort. We are called to do the very best with the gifts and abilities that God has given us. And we can be encouraged by His promise that God never demands from us abilities which we do not have.

It’s interesting how the two servants who have done well are not told to put their feet up! No, instead they are given even more responsibility. The servant who is punished is the one who did not try. He didn’t use his talent. *‘I was afraid’* (v. 25), he said. Do we hide our talents and shy away from using them in our Lord’s service because we are afraid? And what are we afraid of? The hard work involved perhaps, or the responsibility? Maybe we fear what others will think of us. Maybe we are just afraid of failure. It has been said (by whom I do not know!) that ‘the greatest mistake we can make in life is continually fearing that we will make one’. If we do not use our gifts, it’s a case of ‘use it or lose it’ (vv.28-30). We are called to step out in faith, to use our gifts and to risk failure. If we do our best with what God has given us he will give us even more, and like Jim’s encouraging colleagues will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master ’.

Often it happens that people see in us gifts we fail to see in ourselves. So as well as using our own talents in the service of God and of each other, may we also be ‘talent spotters’, calling out the gifts of others. And may we be encouragers, cheering one another along, dispelling fear and keeping hope alive. For encouragement, it seems to me, is rather like kindness – whether given or received, it lifts us.



With greetings to you all from The Rector and Revd Helen

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