

2 BEFORE ADVENT YEAR A

In the parable of the talents, as told in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is speaking to people who have been given special gifts. According to Matthew the servants are entrusted with large amounts of money. A talent was equivalent to 6,000 denarii, the earnings of a day labourer for 20 years. In Luke's telling of this parable the servants are given only 100 denarii. In Matthew's gospel, the immensity of the sum is intended to remind listeners of the preciousness of the gifts God has entrusted to our care. imagine being given enough to live on for 20 years – what would you do with your time and talents?

This puzzling parable has often been used to justify the making of profit – for the greater good – not to finance personal luxury. It is the imagination of the servants as to what their master was like that determined their conscience and their actions. The first two servants believed their master was daring, a man who would do rash and crazy things for which there was no script, would risk losing things and so would end up multiplying things greatly. They sensed their master's regard for them, the trust he placed in them, daring them, encouraging them to be adventurous, and so imagining and trusting that abundance would multiply, they multiplied in abundance. The servant who had hidden his one talent in the ground for fear of being judged, is the one who is cast out – not because he had failed to make a profit, but because he had imagined his master to be a harsh man and could not accept the trust that had been placed in him, the power that had been given to him.

The slave who buries his talent for fear of being judged by a harsh master is treated harshly because he has no love for his master, no willingness to take risks. There is only a grudging acknowledgement of the master's power. The slave is concerned with his own security, not with what he has to give. And he shows no sense of gratitude for the immense gift entrusted to him.

In all the powerlessness we feel, in all the injustice we see around us, we need to remember that we have access to the power that holds all creation. A power that lies within a kingdom not built on oppression and violence, but a kingdom of justice and peace. The kingdom of God is about submission, letting go; it is not about control. That is where our political leaders go wrong – in trying to control, they inevitably oppress.

However faint our prayers for the world may seem, prayer is the most powerful force. We cannot expect to control the world by prayer. So it follows that prayer has to be about letting go. We cannot pray for our own power, our own sense of control. We can only pray for God's power to transform and for the faith to believe that with God all things are possible.

As we approach the season of Advent and the Feast of Christmas, let us all have faith in the immense gift entrusted to us. Let us be aware of the enormous power we have been given to pray for God's kingdom on earth. And let us be watchful for the opportunities we are given to use our talents wisely.