

Investing in lives

David Fotheringham, 15 November 2020
High Street Uniting Church Frankston

Bible reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Prayer led by Catherine Annable:

*Lord God
we thank you
that you have made each of us different.
Each of us unique.
Each differently abled.
Each with something to contribute
to your work in the world.
So help us not to compare ourselves with others
but to know that we are enough just as we are.
Remind us that no one else can do what we can
and that if we hold back,
your work and the world will not be complete.
God who created us,
we offer our whole selves back to you,
for your glory.
Amen.*

That beautiful prayer well captures the essence of this Bible reading. We have different things to contribute, with different responsibilities, distributed according to God's wisdom, and what God asks is that we use them, for good, willingly, with initiative and courage. (Something Catherine certainly does for us.)

In the news-sheet this week I've mentioned how we've received several grants, for Larder and for the organ. These have come from other organisations that have sought to make good with what they have; and they see Larder, and the organ, as causes worthy of investment. And to turn it around the other way, those grants have come this way because of members of the church putting in the effort, putting in time and talent, to put in applications to make known the value of the food support for the community, and the particular qualities of the organ.

It wasn't any of us who built the organ. Loads of effort has been put into property around the church – *and I want to make special mention of the great tidying up work that Murray is overseeing at the moment* – but it's also true that the property is like a gift that we have inherited.

Last Wednesday night the Presbytery met, and one of the topics of discussion was the way in which congregations, in general, are working to find their way out of lockdown, finding

themselves in a new context both socially and financially. It was observed that the Uniting Church has an unusually large amount of property relative to its membership. The conversation revolved around making good use of that which we've been given, being prepared to risk it, for the sake of good in God's mission. We heard some stories of the way that a couple of churches in Mount Waverley are venturing out in a new way together; and of the Sonder Collective, the gathering (or gatherings) of young people across denominational lines that Kelly Skilton from Murumbeena, and others, are investing in and building – investing in people and community and faith.

Today's story is obviously all about taking risks and making investments. It's one of a series of stories from Jesus about how to live in the time of unknown length between Jesus' ascension and when we see him again in the coming fullness of God's reign. He begins: *It's like a man, going on a journey... – that's him – and on his way out the door he distributes his wealth to be looked after.* And the very first thing that we should realise is that these gifts are given generously.

As a unit of money, which it was originally, a talent is worth more than 15 years of wages! So, it's like we're talking like a million dollars! What we can gather about this person heading on their journey is that they are, in fact, both hugely generous and hugely trusting. They give generously, and without giving anything like strict instructions or limiting the possibilities for those who are entrusted. They are free to take initiative.

The immediate next thing to notice is that the One who gives this wealth does so wisely. Each recipient is not given the same: at the master's discretion, one is given 5 talents, another 2, and another 1; so that according to the abilities of each, they are not given burdens too great. The parable is carefully told: the recipient who turns out to be fearful or lazy had not been given the biggest purse – the master is wise enough even in their generosity.

So, over a long time, the recipients trade with what they have. Well, one doesn't. But trading with what you have is clearly what's being promoted here. It seems, in this parable, that maybe one can't go wrong in trading on the talents, as we don't hear an example of failed investment. Maybe that's because in the works of love and mercy there ultimately aren't any bad investments. The only bad investment is the failure to invest at all.

And when the master returns, in the accounting that comes when the fullness of God's kingdom comes, the one who has invested and come up with 5 more talents is celebrated, and welcomed into the master's banquet of joy. The one who has invested and come up with 2 more talents is celebrated, and welcomed into the master's banquet of joy, just the same: the absolute numbers don't matter. Making the most of what's entrusted is key.

There is the third recipient to reckon with. The third recipient claims that the master is harsh – which seems odd, when so much wealth had been shared around with so much trust. But that third one's prophecy became self-fulfilling: he feared that the master would

be harsh, he bunkered down, not doing any good, fearing the worst, and ultimately, that's what came to happen. Which is a dynamic that we often see.

So, clearly, God invites us to be bold in trading with the wealth that we have: to be bold and brave, reaching high and caring deeply, and not just burying ourselves away. *How* we trade with that wealth will be in response to the unique situation in which God has placed us, trusting us to take good initiatives. Together, and as individuals, we have a unique contribution to make, that only we can make - our offering back to God, for God's glory.