

Second Sunday before Advent
15 November 2020

Welcome to Praying Together but Separately

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

HYMN: ALL NATIONS OF THE WORLD (ST MARTIN'S VOICES)

All nations of the world
be joyful in the Lord:
with willing hands your Master serve with one accord:
in ceaseless praise
with heart and voice in him
rejoice through all your days.

Be sure the Lord is God,
creation's source and spring:
in him alone we live, to him our lives we bring.
From days of old
he feeds his flock and guides
the wanderers to his fold.

In gladness go your way:
approach his courts with song
in thankfulness to him to whom all things belong:
His name adore:
his gracious mercy, truth and love for evermore.

Frederick E Le Grice (1911-1992) based on Psalm 100 © 1992 Kevin Mayhew Ltd.

GATHERING BEFORE GOD

I am in the presence of the Living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

PRAYER

Almighty God, We thank you for making us,
For giving us hands to work for you,
Hearts to love you, and voices to praise you. **Amen.**

CONFESSION

As those who know the generosity of God, let us confess our sins,
especially the ways in which we take his good gifts for granted.

Father, in creation you are generous towards us,
yet we have sown sparingly;
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Jesus, you show us the way of humility,
yet we have given reluctantly;
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Holy Spirit, you show us the gift of grace,
yet we have loved grudgingly;
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

THE ABSOLUTION

Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given *us*
a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive *us* our sins,
open our eyes to God's truth,
strengthen *us* to do God's will
and give *us* the joy of his kingdom,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills
us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us with power from on high.**

We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

THE COLLECT

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.

BIBLE READINGS:

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When 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! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But 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. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

HYMN: IMMORTAL INVISIBLE (ST MARTIN'S VOICES)

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish, but naught changest thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight
all laud we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)

Matthew 25.14-30

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then 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." His 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." And 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." His 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.” Then 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; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” But 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? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For 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. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

SERMON

The prolific hymn-writer Fanny Crosby wrote over nine thousand hymns. Born in New York in 1820, she was blind virtually from birth, but resolved to dedicate her life to God and to use her gifts to help the poor. At fifteen she entered the New York Institution for the Blind, where she spent thirty-five years as a pupil and teacher. Her determination not to be beaten by her disability was awe-inspiring, as was her prodigious memory. Before Braille was invented she learned a number of Bible books by heart. When

Fanny began missionary work on the deprived streets of New York’s East Side, she supported herself through hymn-writing. Her usual fee was two dollars per hymn, which was frequently given to a poor person. She lived to the age of ninety-five, and was writing hymns right up to her death in 1915. Some forty years later her best-known hymn, “To God Be the Glory”, emerged as part of the official songbook for Billy Graham’s London crusade of 1954. So enthusiastic was the reaction of the audience, that Billy Graham insisted the hymn be repeated every night of the crusade.

One interpretation of the parable of the talents, in today’s Gospel reading, is for the man going away on a long journey to be Jesus ascending to

heaven. In this interpretation the slaves represent Christians, the talents the gifts of the Spirit, and the return of the master is the return of Jesus. But whichever way the parable is interpreted, the teaching is clear. The talents were given to people according to their abilities. Talents are what make us what we are and set us apart from other people. But in God’s eyes there are no winners and losers, no pecking order, no hierarchy. The reality that some people will be able to run or swim faster than others, or some be better writers, musicians or businesspeople, matters not to God. What matters is that we put our talents to good use. It is significant that the slave who had made two talents was given equal praise to the slave who had made five.

This parable is part of a series at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, all with the theme of judgement. Talents are given to us on trust and we are each held responsible for full and faithful use of these gifts. The reward for good service may be a larger responsibility in the work of God’s kingdom, but inaction and timidity will bring judgement and spiritual destruction. Significantly, the Gospel story devotes more space to the exchange between the master and the “wicked” slave – and to his fate – than anything else.

To whom much is given, much will be expected.” The billionaire Bill Gates’ mother said these words to her son shortly after he was married and just before she died. Our gifts are unique to us in both nature and quantity and we are duty-bound to use them in the knowledge that we will help and enrich others, not just ourselves.

We will also have opportunities in our lives. Opportunities to influence others, or to determine a course of events, can be regarded as talents. Fanny Crosby saw her disability, with which she dealt without blame or self-pity, as an opportunity to concentrate on what she could do best, to the glory of God. Also relevant is our availability. Time after time in the Bible, when there is a particular task to be accomplished, God does not look at the ability or inability of a person, but their availability. Some

people, blessed with more devotion to God than obvious talents, make themselves available with their willingness to serve.

Whatever our talents, we must never let them wither from lack of use. We are to improve the quality of our work for God, and widen its scope according to our circumstances and abilities. We are to do what we do, but better and with greater focus and attention. Like the slaves in the story, we are to be stewards and, as St Paul says to the Corinthians: "it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy". If we are faithful and trustworthy stewards for God, it will never be a chore.

HYMN: Blessed Assurance (Nicholas)

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

Written by Fanny Crosby

OUR PRAYERS

Dear Lord, Father God,

Bless the mission of the church, as it seeks to reveal your kingdom.
May we be seen as children of the day, and not of the night,
that we may encourage and build up one another in the faith,
that each of us may use our talents to the benefit of others and to your glory.

We pray for all evangelists and preachers of the word.
Saviour of the world,
save us and help us.

We remember before you all those who exercise their gifts in government, in commerce, in the building up of society.

We pray for those whose talents cannot be used through no fault of their own:
the world poor, the oppressed, the troubled.

We remember all who are frustrated in their work or in their lives.

We pray for those whose world is collapsing around them
Saviour of the world,
save us and help us.

We rejoice in the gifts you have given to us;
may we share them and use them aright.

We pray for specially talented people,
for musicians and artists,
for writers and craftspeople,
for scientists and research workers,
for creators and inventors.

Saviour of the world,
save us and help us.

We pray for persons with disabilities who suffer prejudice and difficulty,
May unjust structures in society change as we celebrate diversity.

We remember all in sickness, and pray especially for...

Saviour of the world,
save us and help us.

We rejoice in the saints of God,
all who have triumphed over their struggles
and now have the glorious liberty of the children of God.
We pray for friends and loved ones departed,
especially....
Saviour of the world,
save us and help us.

From, 'Clouds and Glory: Prayers for the Church Year A', by David Adams

A PRAYER CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.
in their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

LISTEN TO ST MARTIN'S VOICES SINGING WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD

He has shown you what is good:
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God.
Amen. *Micah 6-8*

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

My Jesus,
I believe that You
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.
I love You above all things,
and I desire to receive You into my soul.
Since I cannot at this moment
receive You sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You.
Never permit me to be separated from You. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen

THE BLESSING

May God give to you and those you love
his comfort and his peace,
his light and his joy,
in this world and the next:
and the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you,
and with those you love,
This day, and for evermore. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, **Amen**

HYMN: To God be the Glory

To God be the glory, great things he hath done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the lifegate that all may go in.

Refrain

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father thru Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory, great things he hath done!

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,
and great our rejoicing thru Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

Written by Fanny Crosby